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Stevenson, Conrad and the Proto-Modernist Novel

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Abstract

This thesis argues that Robert Louis Stevenson's South Seas writings locate him alongside Joseph Conrad on the 'strategic fault line' described by the Marxist critic Fredric Jameson that delineates the interstitial area between nineteenth-century adventure fiction and early Modernism.

Stevenson, like Conrad, mounts an attack on the assumptions of the grand narrative of imperialism and, in texts such as 'The Beach of Falesá' and *The Ebb Tide*, offers late-Victorian readers a critical view of the workings of Empire.

The present study seeks to analyse the common interests of two important writers as they adopt innovative literary methodologies within, and in response to, the context of changing perceptions of the effects of European influence upon the colonial subject.

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Abbreviations

The titles of works cited in this thesis are given in full in the first instance, either in the body-text or in an end-note. Subsequent references to these works are given in abbreviated form, with a page reference, in brackets in the text.

Abbreviations are given as in the following examples:

TBF ‘The Beach of Falesá’

CNC *Conrad in the Nineteenth Century*

TETV ‘*The Ebb Tide and Victory*’

Introduction

In an important discussion of Joseph Conrad's significance as an early modernist writer, the critic Fredric Jameson states:

Conrad marks, indeed, a strategic fault line in the emergence of contemporary narrative, a place from which the structure of twentieth-century literary and cultural *institutions* becomes visible as it could not be in the heterogeneity of Balzacian registers, nor even in the discontinuities of the paradigms which furnish materials for what is an increasingly unified narrative apparatus in Gissing. In Conrad we can sense the emergence not merely of what will be contemporary modernism (itself now become a literary institution), but also, still tangibly juxtaposed with it, of what will variously be called popular culture or mass culture, the commercialized cultural discourse of what, in late capitalism, is often described as a media society.¹

Conrad's position on the 'fault line' described by Jameson has resulted in his work being much admired and much studied in the wider context of literary modernism, and justly so. This thesis will argue that Robert Louis Stevenson deserves to be considered alongside Conrad on that strategic fault line and it will argue, furthermore, that the texts that place him there are his late South Seas works, especially 'The Beach of Falesá' (1893) and *The Ebb Tide* (1894).

The core elements of 'The Beach of Falesá' and *The Ebb Tide* that allow comparisons to be drawn with Conrad cohere in their willingness to probe and to challenge the assumptions and outlook (the grand narrative) of Imperial *fin-de-siècle* Britain and Europe. This is a feature both texts share with, for example, *Heart of Darkness* (1899). However, the full extent of the challenging nature of 'The Beach of Falesá', to cite one Stevenson text, has been concealed until relatively recently. The work carried out by Professor Barry Menikoff in restoring the holograph text of 'The Beach of Falesá'² marks a turning-point for Stevenson studies. Menikoff discusses the bowdlerisation of 'Falesá' during the publication process, a bowdlerisation undertaken in response to Stevenson's original text which foregrounds references to miscegenation, criticism of colonial rule and the

presentation of whites as an exploitative presence in the South Seas. In short, in its original form, the novel contained enough material offensive to Victorian sensibilities to ensure its censorship. Menikoff's work thus points to the potential significance of Stevenson's contribution in his late fiction to the *fin-de-siècle* debate on Empire, and marks the starting-point for the present study which will explore some of the implications raised in Menikoff's analysis. It will be argued here that Stevenson's principal attack on the values of the British Empire, begun in 'The Beach of Falesá', is to be found in *The Ebb Tide* and that, furthermore, *The Ebb Tide* provides the thematic and structural bases for Conrad's *Victory* which itself examines similar material. The present thesis will argue that these points of connection between Stevenson and Conrad legitimise the claim that Stevenson should be regarded as occupying a place alongside Conrad on the strategic fault line identified by Jameson.

Both Stevenson and Conrad had what may be described as similar 'insider-outsider' relationships to the colonial process, belonging as they did within subordinate components of larger politico-economic structures. As a Scot within the British Empire, Stevenson occupied a similar position to that of Conrad, a Pole in the Russian Empire: neither were unequivocal supporters of the imperialistic ambitions of the greater political partner. This thesis, while generally accepting the thrust of Linda Colley's valuable argument, will modify and develop the position she proposes in *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1873*. In her important study, Professor Colley argues that the Scots were, by the nineteenth century, enthusiastic supporters of Empire³. The changes that would take place in the period following 1873 are alluded to in Professor Colley's *Introduction* as she states that the 1880s 'witnessed a marked rise in Home Rule

sentiment in Wales and Scotland as well as in parts of Ireland. (Though public cults of Great Britain *and of Greater Britain* were also evident in the self-same period).’ [*Preface to Vintage Edition*, xi]. Colley’s argument that a significant number of Victorian Scots were in favour of Empire is accepted: what is significant is that Stevenson, himself a supporter of Empire, can be seen to undergo a change during his time in Samoa as he comes into contact with the reality of Empire in the South Pacific. The relationship of Scots to the grand narrative of Imperial Britain is complicated by Stevenson himself both in ‘The Beach of Falesá’ and *The Ebb Tide*. As Menikoff emphasises throughout his *Introduction* to ‘The Beach of Falesá’, it was Stevenson’s critical portrayal of the workings of the colonial process that generated negative receptions towards the texts in question. Discussion of the implications of Colley’s contribution to the debate surrounding Empire literature and Menikoff’s assessment of the role of Victorian publishers will be undertaken in the following chapter, ‘*The Beach of Falesá*: A Turning Point in Stevenson’s Fiction?’

The role of Scots in the acquisition and administration of Empire is also the subject of historian Michael Fry’s recent study, *The Scottish Empire*⁴. In his analysis of the influence of Scots in the South Seas, Fry makes reference to Stevenson’s growing anti-Imperialist stance in a passage about Stevenson’s support for Samoan self-determination in the face of foreign interference in local affairs:

He [Stevenson] felt certain that these had in effect stirred up the conflict, sacrificing the tribesmen to resolve an impasse among themselves. But he wanted to do more than dwell on details of an obscure struggle already lost and won. He told his readers rather that, while the Germans were the cruellest colonialists, the British and the Americans had nothing to be proud of. He explained how the islanders’ cast of mind was communistic, so that they could not understand the economy of plantations, and felt at a loss confronted with the sort of administration foisted on them: ‘the law to be enforced, causes of dispute between brown and white eliminated, taxes to be

raised, a central power created, a country opened up, the native race taught industry: all these were detestable to the natives.' [TSE, 239].

The assumptions embedded in the passage cited by Fry from Stevenson's *A Footnote to History* (1892) will be a central concern in this thesis since they provide the background to the focal texts under consideration here. The insistence on European values and systems and the imposition of these on non-European peoples preoccupied Stevenson and in both 'The Beach of Falesá' and *The Ebb Tide*, he questions the validity of such assumptions in a manner similar to that of Joseph Conrad.

The role of elite groups within politically and culturally subordinate states and their relationship to the dominant external power will be one for elaboration later in this study but is perhaps worthy of mention here that Stevenson did not have a perception of Scotland as 'North Britain'. The emergence of a sense of inclusive endeavour associated with a positive disposition towards Empire on the part of Scots in the eighteenth century, especially in the aftermath of Union and particularly following the defeat of the Jacobites at Culloden, is one aspect of Colley's argument. The sense of Scots possessing a dual identity, both Scottish and British, within the Imperial project is apparent. However, alongside the developments charted by Professor Colley, there exists a more restrained attitude, and one perhaps less enthusiastic about 'North Britain'. It is an attitude shared by Stevenson as his letter to S.R. Crockett dated c. 10th April 1888 seems to indicate:

Don't put 'N.B.' on your paper: put *Scotland*, and be done with it. Alas, that I should be stabbed in the house of my friends! The name of my native land is not *North Britain*, whatever may be the name of yours.⁵

While Stevenson is quite clear about his origins in this injunction to Crockett, there is nothing here to suggest that he does not acquiesce in the spirit of Empire described by Colley, although it should be borne in mind that Stevenson does

assert his Scottishness. That assertion of Scottishness, however, cannot be equated with anti-Empire sympathies and it is a significant element of the core argument of the present study that Stevenson's attitude to Empire can be seen to change away from an acceptance of the Imperial project towards a more critical stance. The unqualified application of Colley's thesis to the period following 1837 is problematic and an area that the present writer will seek to examine in connection with the literary output of both Stevenson and Conrad. By the time Stevenson came to write this letter to Crockett there was a sense of disquiet and anxiety about Empire, particularly in relation to reverse colonization, a late-Victorian preoccupation which would spawn such works as Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886) and Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897). It will be argued below that this anxiety operated in Scotland as elsewhere.

Scottish involvement in imperialist expansion had not been confined to the period of Victoria's rule: the process of acquiring colonies had lasted some four hundred years. However, imperialism reached its high-water mark during the period of the mid- to late-nineteenth century and, in order to locate the literature under consideration in this study in a context, a brief survey of the principal issues is necessary. The colonization of the 'blank spaces' on the map was undertaken by the maritime peoples of Western Europe, and the importance attached to mariners is reflected in a variety of texts under analysis in this thesis. The role of the master mariner in the acquisition and expansion of Empire is central, and both Conrad as a former sea captain and Stevenson as a well-seasoned voyager understood the status enjoyed by these men. In Stevenson's South Seas texts, it is symptomatic of the extent of their personal decline that sea captains such as Davis and Randall should be cast as representatives of the flotsam of the Pacific. The

predicament of Captain Billy Randall ‘on the beach’ at Falesá and that of Davis, similarly becalmed at Papeete in *The Ebb Tide*, serves to mark the level of their respective descents from the positions of authority they have previously enjoyed. In the Victorian imagination then, master mariners were important participants in the drive for economic primacy, and the undercutting of such ‘heroes’, it will be argued, suggests that they stand as emblems of an Empire in decay. Randall and Davis personify the crisis in confidence in Empire that figures so prominently in these *fin-de-siècle* narratives and which establish Stevenson’s participation in a similarly critical response to Empire as that pursued by Conrad.

The aggressive imperialism described by Conrad is associated with the period following 1870 and is concentrated upon two specific geographical areas, namely Africa and eastern Asia. Prior to 1870 neither of these important areas had been subjected to significant European influence, but in the short time between 1870 and 1914, competition for hegemony was at its height.⁶ There existed no external brake to European expansionism and animosities between European powers were channelled into competition for overseas colonies. The acquisition of Empire enabled Britain, France and Germany to sell their excess goods to their colonies and so create permanent market places for surplus goods. Stevenson satirizes the economic basis of this process in his short story ‘The Bottle Imp’ (1893), in which the irrationality of market economics is illustrated. The eponymous imp can only be sold on at a loss to the owner and the consequent reversal of the norms of commerce points up the illusory nature of ‘wealth’ and suggests other, less transient values. The British problems associated with surplus population and the need to export surplus goods could be offset to an extent by colonialism. Ironically, the solution would involve a process of degeneration that would

engender the sense of crisis in relation to the Imperial project apparent in the focal texts under analysis in the present study.

As if to prepare the way for trade, missionaries were sent to the colonies to proselytize the Christian religion. Stevenson demonstrates an ambivalent attitude to religion in ‘The Beach of Falesá’ and *The Ebb Tide*, and it will be argued that he associates the representatives of organised religion with colonial interests. The role of the Christian missionaries in the spread of colonialism is well documented⁷ but it may merit mention that David Livingstone, a medical missionary with the London Missionary Society was accorded the status of a national hero when he died in Africa in 1873. His body was taken to London under naval escort and buried in Westminster Abbey. The Roman Catholic missions, mostly French, were also prominent with some 40,000 missionaries spread around the globe and Stevenson highlights the competition for souls as a corollary to economic competition in ‘The Beach of Falesá’, counter-pointing Galuchet and Tarleton as representatives of the respective, doctrinally-opposed, parties. The relationship between missionaries and the acquisition of territory is made clear in a letter written by John G. Paton of the New Hebrides Mission in 1883. The following is a representative extract from a report by the Mission relayed to London and subsequently published in British Government documents, *Accounts and Papers*, for the year 1883:

For the following reasons we think that the British government ought now to take possession of the New Hebrides group of the South Sea Islands, of the Solomon Group, and of all the intervening chain of islands from Fiji to New Guinea:

1. Because she has already taken possession of Fiji in the east, and we hope it will soon be known authoritatively that she has taken possession of New Guinea at the northwest, adjoining her Australian possessions, and the islands between complete this chain of islands lying along the Australian coast.
2. The sympathy of the New Hebrides natives are all with Great Britain, hence they long for British protection while they fear and hate the French, who appear eager to

annex the group, because they have seen the way the French have treated the native races in New Caledonia, the Loyalty Islands, and other South Sea islands.

3. Until within the past few months almost all the Europeans on the New Hebrides were British subjects, who long for British protection.

4. All the men and all the money used in civilizing and Christianizing the New Hebrides have been British. Now fourteen missionaries and the *Dayspring* mission ship, and about 150 native evangelists and teachers are employed in the above work in this group, in which over £6000 yearly of British and British-colonial money is expended; and certainly it would be unwise to let any other power now take possession and reap the fruits of all this British outlay.⁸

It is possible to draw inferences from this report that suggest the missionaries were engaged in work other than, or in addition to, the salvation of souls and the relationship between the missions and the government in London is more complicated than it at first appears. The missions were in close contact with the local population and could make shrewd guesses about the disposition of that population to become subject to British dominion. The role of missionaries in the imperial process is discussed at some length by Neil Gunson in *Messengers of Grace* and both Stevenson and Conrad foreground the role of Christian missions in the texts under examination in this thesis. Indeed, it will be suggested that in the fiction under consideration here, both writers demonstrate their disillusionment with imperial ambition and do so in a manner seldom unequivocal. It appears that both writers recognised that this was a contentious area and were moving cautiously towards more overt criticism. In an important way, the tentative nature of the criticism of Christian missions in the works of both writers illustrates once again the point of location on the fault line described by Jameson. Stevenson in particular makes several references to the role of the missions in the South Seas and this subject will be elaborated upon in the following chapter of the present work. Missions were intimately bound up with the whole Imperial project, including its economic and power rivalry aspects. The

suspicion of Empire that emerges in the works of Stevenson and Conrad is manifested in the reservations about missions articulated in their texts.

The complex interweaving of trade and religious conversion is difficult to unravel and the extent to which missionaries paved the way for the traders or vice versa is equally difficult to establish. Stevenson would seem to foreground this very issue in the ‘South Sea Bridal’ chapter of ‘The Beach of Falesá’ in which Wiltshire and Uma’s sham marriage ceremony is conducted in Randall’s trading-post. What may be posited is a late-nineteenth-century assumption that it was legitimate for European religions to dominate over local customs and beliefs. Such assumptions underpinned an appreciation of indigenous peoples as ‘backward’ and ‘heathen’. In the fiction of Stevenson and Conrad there is evidence to suggest that missionaries did play some part in the processes of Empire and both writers cast doubts on the moral basis for their presence in the colonies of European states. In this sense, both writers appear to undermine the prevailing attitude of the High Imperialist era that supposes Western values are affirmative and final. This study will make reference to work carried out by Patrick Brantlinger in which he discusses the emergence of ‘a national or racial absolute’ and the extent to which this is central to the writing under consideration here. Stevenson was certainly not an uncritical participant in the colonial process and it will be argued that in ‘The Beach of Falesá’ he embarks upon a critique of Empire to be concluded in the more robustly antagonistic text, *The Ebb Tide*. Moreover, it must be acknowledged that while neither Stevenson nor Conrad can be portrayed as twenty-first century egalitarians, they were both ahead of most of their contemporaries in offering dissenting comment on European colonial expansion. Once again, both writers can be placed on the strategic fault line

described by Jameson. Furthermore, Stevenson and Conrad are concerned with what Edward Said describes in a critical appraisal of *Heart of Darkness* as ‘Domination and inequities of power and wealth [as] perennial facts of human society’⁹. Said goes on to suggest that while these factors are equally apparent in present-day political transactions they may also be viewed as constants in relation to the period of High Imperialism. He develops his argument by stating that the Third World countries in the late-twentieth century are ‘as dominated and dependent as when they were ruled directly by European powers.’ [TVHoD, 508]

In addition, both Stevenson in ‘The Beach of Falesá’ and Conrad in *Heart of Darkness* can be seen to be moving away from the conventions of adventure fiction both in respect of form and thematics. Stevenson’s development as a novelist is evidenced by his radical departure from the formulaic structures of the adventure story, but there remains the connective tissue of exotic settings, schooners and distant islands to link *The Ebb Tide* to *Treasure Island* (1882), *Kidnapped* (1886) and *Catriona* (1893), for example. Here again, there is evidence to position Stevenson next to Conrad on Jameson’s fault line. The retention of elements of adventure writing may account in some degree for the reluctance on the part of earlier critics to acknowledge the significance of *The Ebb Tide* in Stevenson’s later writings. In recognising the points of similarity, they appear to miss, or to ignore, the points of departure. The importance of Jameson’s contribution in identifying the fault line is established: he identifies that point of *chiasmus* from one form of writing to another. In the context of this thesis, that point is identified as the stage at which the discourse of adventure fiction is nuanced to produce the proto-Modernist novel. The adventure tale brought to more or less satisfactory conclusion is arguably a different genre to the

open-ended and ambivalent texts under analysis in this study. The fiction located on the fault line identified by Jameson is, in the terminology used in this study, proto-Modernist fiction. In the 1890s, the novel form had not yet developed into the full-blown Modernism of Joyce or Woolf but it had moved on, this thesis will argue, from the framing discourse of earlier adventure fiction.

There is another important element which merits discussion and it relates to Stevenson's intention to ensure that his portrayal of life in the Pacific should be realistic, as he outlines in a letter to Colvin dated 28 September 1891: 'You will know more about the South Seas after you have read my little tale, than if you had read a library.'¹⁰ It may be argued that Stevenson's earlier fiction is firmly located in the tradition of romance but in *Catriona*, for example, Stevenson demonstrates an eagerness to write in a realistic mode. However, his removal to Samoa marks a significant shift in the direction of his creative gaze and this is the area of interest central to the discussion in the present thesis.

As part of the process of moving away from the conventional formula of adventure writing, Stevenson demonstrates a willingness to experiment with forms which themselves appear to utilise elements associated with literary Modernism and consequently some discussion of the salient issues defining that convulsive movement will follow. For example, the significance of structure and symbolism in *The Ebb Tide* and the extent to which this text represents a further distancing from the earlier fiction will form an important strand of the focal argument later in this study. Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* has been a reference point for a number of critics seeking to establish theories of colonialism and imperialism and this process is understandable. The introduction of Stevenson

into the debate has been relatively tentative and this thesis will seek to enrich that debate by exploring Stevenson's relevance to it.

Stevenson's standing as a major intellectual, a profound theoretician on art and literature as well as a writer of poetry, fiction, travel journalism and literary essays has been established as the result of an on-going process of re-evaluation carried out by scholars such as Menikoff, Jenni Calder, Catherine Kerrigan and Alan Sandison. This study will seek to contribute to that body of scholarship by illustrating the significance of Stevenson's status as a co-critic of Empire, a status which entitles him to be ranked alongside Conrad as an innovative and challenging writer, and as a writer engaged on a similar project. It will be argued in this thesis that Stevenson makes a significant contribution to what may be described as proto-Modernist writing in both 'The Beach of Falesá' and *The Ebb Tide*. Furthermore, it will be argued that Conrad viewed Stevenson in terms similar to those Robert Wiesbuch uses to link Dickens and Hawthorne citing a 'competitive admiration'¹¹ on the part of the latter for the former. In Conrad's case the feeling is not entirely unqualified but, nevertheless, the two can be viewed as being engaged in a related venture and located side-by-side on the fault line established by Jameson.

The framing discourse of the material under consideration in the following chapters of this study is that of imperialism and some discussion of the rhetoric of imperialism is fundamental to the discussion of particular texts. This study will consider the relational elements connecting Stevenson's late fiction to some of Conrad's material, looking at broader themes and their treatment by each writer. Foucault argues that it is essential to view the writing of the period under examination as an integral component of imperialism rather than as a reflection or

by-product of it¹². That is to say, for example, *Heart of Darkness* is not simply a 'reflection' of Empire but in a very real sense the novel itself is a component part of the mindset that legitimised colonial hegemony. The extent to which Conrad and Stevenson were complicit in the processes of imperialism will therefore form a central element of this thesis. The sense of both writers being *en route*, metaphorically speaking, from one tradition towards another once again reinforces the significance of Jameson's identification of a boundary being crossed.

There is little sense of a unified structure in relation to Western imperialism in the nineteenth century, nor is there a unified body of literary texts which deals with the process of colonial expansion. Instead there exists a fractionated 'literature' of imperialism which includes within it diverse narratives of the experience of whites as they encounter the colonial Other, so that Kipling and Haggard can be included in this body as well as Stevenson and Conrad. However, in texts such as 'An Outpost of Progress' and *The Ebb Tide*, Conrad and Stevenson demur from affirmative responses to European domination of foreign cultures and as such they challenge the colonizing discourse of the late-nineteenth century.

It will be argued that they challenge that discourse, however, within the limitations imposed upon them by contemporary political and cultural assumptions, especially those relating to race. In considering Stevenson and Conrad as proto-Modernists, this thesis will seek to establish the extent to which both writers remain involved in pre-modern nineteenth-century Imperialist assumptions. Even in matters of apparently straightforward description, evidence will emerge that suggests both writers debase the colonial subject by means of

aestheticization. It may appear that Uma and Aissa are negated as 'significant' Others as a result of their respective creator's absorption in considerations of their exoticism and physical attractiveness. They are to be appreciated as *objects* rather than people and these insights into the workings of the contemporary Western mind are evidenced in several texts under consideration in this study. It will be postulated that these women are to be understood in terms radically different to the appreciation of the domesticated Victorian wife and, ultimately, they are to be viewed in commodity terms. The perception develops that Stevenson and Conrad are themselves influenced by a body of values that is predicated upon rule and particularly the assumption of the right to rule which exists outside the more narrowly defined process of direct oppression. There is an interesting link between issues of gender and power mechanisms as these carry over from the domestic arrangements of Victorian society into the sphere of colonial rule. It is tempting, although perhaps overly simplistic, to equate the relationship of coloniser and colonised with the structures of a patriarchal society but it is significant that Stevenson and Conrad create women who come to challenge the core values of the European men they come into contact with and, consequently, they undercut the gender assumptions associated with the dominant male society. From a position of passive and commodified impersonality, these women emerge to present a real threat to the values of middle-class Victorian males. An instance which may substantiate this theory occurs in the Conrad text, *Almayer's Folly* wherein the eponymous 'hero' is opposed at various junctures both by this wife and his daughter, neither of whom could be said to be compliant or subservient. The location of Stevenson and Conrad on the fault line means that they remain bound up in nineteenth-century gender assumptions just as they are bound up in

nineteenth-century assumptions about race. They are associated with old values but they perceive, uneasily perhaps, different and challenging ways to view both indigenous populations and women. It will be argued that both Stevenson and Conrad draw female characters designed to function as repositories of cultural tradition and, as such, they offer resistance to the colonising males. Just as gender relationships are subjected to scrutiny, so the relationships between cultures are questioned and the assumptions relating to the validity of European claims on foreign territories are challenged. The nineteenth-century belief in the right of whites to rule over the 'dark peoples' is subjected to critical attention and the ambivalent nature of terms such as 'savage' and 'civilized' is emphasised as the rapacity of colonial rule is described. This is most obviously seen in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, but Stevenson is engaged in the analysis of similar themes in the focal texts considered here. While both Stevenson and Conrad mount challenges on the naturalistic 'logic' of the assumptions of racial superiority, they do so as colonisers themselves, a fact that cannot easily be removed from any discussion of their works. In coming to terms with those figures they encounter in the South Seas in Stevenson's case, or in the Malay Archipelago and Africa in Conrad's, both writers are significantly influenced by their historical and cultural relationships to the colonial Other.

The present study will examine the nineteenth-century belief in the legitimacy of the progressive, 'modern' man's desire to oppose, and by extension, to subjugate the 'savage'. Pre-modern, nineteenth-century assumptions dominate the foundational belief systems challenged by Stevenson and Conrad in this area where both writers clearly demonstrate common concerns and, indeed, a common project. Both Stevenson and Conrad suggest that the requirement to subjugate

undermines the legitimacy of the action, calling into question the very authority to act in such a manner in the first place and this is a central issue in all the texts under discussion. A parallel consideration will focus on the impact of fiction writing in the late-nineteenth century and the extent to which both Stevenson and Conrad succeed in informing readers of the realities of imperialism using a methodology other than historical narration. The use of heavily symbolic images evidences a movement in the direction of modernist techniques in the works of both writers and close analysis of these symbolic references will be undertaken. This analysis will focus around the ‘fault line’ delineated by Fredric Jameson.

The present thesis will seek to locate the Stevenson and Conrad texts considered herein within a literary context which predates full-blown Modernism: the term *proto*-Modernism has been adopted for reasons which require some explanation. There is a sense in which the shaping *literary* discourse of all the texts under discussion remains that of nineteenth-century adventure fiction. Both Stevenson and Conrad are associated with the use of tropes from Romanticism, especially in their insistence on setting as something more significant than mere backdrop, and both are unable or unwilling to distance themselves from the desire to look to the past for solutions to contemporary problems. Yet both experiment with form and structure in new and radical ways: Conrad in *Heart of Darkness* and Stevenson perhaps even more so in *The Ebb Tide*, a text which itself it is argued below, forms a model for Conrad’s novel, *Victory*.

In his *Introduction* to an anthology of critical monographs on Joseph Conrad, Andrew Michael Roberts defines and distinguishes ‘modernism’ and ‘modernity’ thus:

Modernity as a social, cultural and economic condition can be distinguished from modernism, a movement in the arts generally associated with innovation in

technique and radical change in the conception of art's role and function. Modernity and modernism are of course closely linked: modernism is arguably a response to the condition of modernity, a condition in which urbanisation, technological change, imperialism and war produced rapid changes in social structures, ways of life and patterns of belief and behaviour. (JC, 20)

Both Stevenson and Conrad are describing a world that is undergoing fundamental changes due to the re-drawing of the political map as the result of European expansion. The period of colonialism from 1870-1914 describes the focal parameters of this thesis and the analysis of colonial discourse to be found in the works of Stevenson and Conrad relates to this epoch. It is important at this early stage to emphasise that this thesis will not seek to attempt to categorize a set of texts that offers final answers in relation to colonial discourses. It will, rather, seek to show points of departure from an earlier tradition and it will argue that the writers in question use literary devices which would indicate their co-existence on a fault line separating modernist texts from writing of an earlier tradition. The works central to this discussion occur on either side of Jameson's perceived fault line. It will be argued, for example, that the Stevenson texts are indicative of a process through which a writer can be traced making the step across that notional fault line into another fictive dimension.

The measure of technological advancement in the Victorian period is remarkable and Conrad in particular makes this an important issue in several texts including *An Outcast of the Islands*. Roberts correctly emphasises the importance of the relationship between modernity and modernism showing that the significance of technology is two-fold: it firstly locates the literature of the period in a thematic sense by illustrating the massive changes to accepted ways which were fashioned in the late-nineteenth century. Secondly, its influence in terms of an experimental mind-set is central to artistic developments during the same

period. In a sense, the fault line around which Stevenson and Conrad are positioned resembles that which may be discerned between Neo-Classicism and Romanticism: it is located in a period of uncertainty and questions that which hitherto had been held to be axiomatic. Michael Levenson's identification of the 'agon of modernism...the struggle between its values and forms'¹³ lies at the core of this thesis, especially as it addresses the Stevenson text, *The Ebb Tide* and its relationship to Conrad's *Victory*. It will be necessary to prefigure that specific element of the study with a more general discussion of the elements which underpin claims to have Stevenson considered alongside Conrad as a major contributor to a radical literary movement. *The Ebb Tide* is Stevenson's closest approximation to a 'modern' text and it will be argued that it lies on the side of the fault line associated with literary modernism. However, this thesis will seek to make a contribution to the debate opened up by Alan Sandison in his chapter on 'The Ebb Tide' in *Robert Louis Stevenson and the Appearance of Modernism*¹⁴ and, moreover, it will offer an alternative critical interpretation to that proposed by Sandison.

Roberts associates 'obscurity and difficulty' with modernist texts (JC, 22), and these features are not apparent in any great measure in the earlier texts considered in this study. However, it is possible to trace departures from the conventions of the adventure discourse and, as a means of fore-grounding the focal argument, this will help to contextualise the study of *The Ebb Tide* and *Victory*.

A further issue central to this thesis is the extent to which literary modernism is associated with a loss of ontological security in the late-Victorian period. As Roberts argues, the major upheaval associated with rapid technological

advancement had the effect of creating a sense of dislocation from tried and tested formulae and the security that is found in established ways. Given the dominant role of Britain in the world in the period from the mid-nineteenth century it is remarkable that confidence in the colonial venture should appear to evaporate towards the *fin-de-siècle*. The radical changes brought about by the Industrial Revolution are important in this respect as are the serious challenges mounted on well-established belief systems, particularly those associated with the religious beliefs. It will be shown that a relationship between Christianity and capitalism is acknowledged in the works under analysis and a sense develops that the colonial process is under-pinned by a hypocritical moralism intended to be destructive of the indigenous cultures it encounters. Furthermore, the texts in question suggest a culture bereft of direction and impotent in the face of the vitality of the native peoples portrayed both by Stevenson and Conrad. The extent to which Uma is portrayed as an individual much more worthy than any of the ‘civilised’ whites in ‘The Beach of Falesá’ is an illustration of this point.

Importantly, both writers attempt to make sense of a world in which judgement is removed from the traditional *loci* – the standards of consensus, societal authority and textual authority – to individualised, phenomenological responses in which certainty is removed and meaning is located in individual experience. The convulsive movement predicated, as Roberts argues, upon the technological change that heralded modernity has its literary equivalent in the early modern works central to the present study. The emphasis in each of the texts under consideration is on the individual protagonist and his predicament. In this sense, the texts can be reasonably described as *proto-* or *pre-modernist*, bound up as they are in the psychology, politics and economics of the late-nineteenth century, the

point from which, it may be argued, the nascent modernist movement can be traced. The requirement to find an appropriate literary form to describe the aforementioned sense of uncertainty results in the movement away from the conventions of an earlier tradition in fiction writing. That movement is characterized by its adoption of a much more heavily symbolic formulation similar to that used by W.B. Yeats in 'The Second Coming', a poem appositely connected to the *zeitgeist*:

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.¹⁵

The poet illustrates the collapse of order and structure and heralds the emergence of a subjective age, characterized by arrogance and violence. This thesis will seek to propose that in the literature of the late-nineteenth century, Stevenson and Conrad prefigure some of the anxieties central to Yeats's poem. A recurring and powerful theme in the focal texts is that of regression in those characters transposed into alien environments. The obvious example is Kurtz in *Heart of Darkness*, but Stevenson addresses the same theme personified by Billy Randall in 'The Beach of Falesá' and in the characters of Davis, Herrick and Huish in *The Ebb Tide*. Both Stevenson and Conrad explore a connection between spatial distance from the centre of civilisation, commonly London, and a deterioration in standards of behaviour without ever being clear about why this should happen. It is assumed that it is as a result of exposure to the processes of imperialism that Kayerts and Carrier in 'An Outpost of Progress,' and Wiltshire and Case in 'The Beach of Falesá', revert to less civilised behaviour but the issue is never

comfortably resolved: the resulting ambivalence, is, perhaps, a key trope of the proto-modernist novel.

Attempts to define in acceptably accurate terms the constituent elements of ‘Modernism’ are almost always prefaced by an acknowledgement of the impossibility of the task. This thesis is concerned with those elements of literary modernism relating to matters of structure and theme, particularly as they address the over-arching debate surrounding Empire. The ‘modern’ usage of symbols is well documented in relation to the study of modernism. This study will seek to examine the significance of a specific rhetoric associated with Empire and the in-built tropes of a literature of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries that is thematically linked.

Stevenson’s departure from the techniques and themes of his earlier writing is problematic on a variety of levels. His abandonment of a successful formula for a new style, certainly in *The Ebb Tide*, and an interest in new and controversial subject matter requires some explanation and some reference to formative events in Samoa is necessary in order to elucidate the reasons for his radical change of stance. The requirement to find a new way to express his concerns is bound up in the need to respond to hitherto unknown issues and the sense of Stevenson’s location on the point of cross-over between literary discourses is once again apparent. Away from Scotland, in an environment undergoing radical political change both internally and under external influence, Stevenson can be seen to be caught up in the process described by Roberts as technological and social changes create the need for a new and appropriate discourse to describe those changes. Stevenson, like Conrad, witnessed the brutality perpetrated by whites upon the

indigenous population and comments on it in a letter to Adelaide Boodle, dated 4 January 1892:

Aha, say you, and what is a black boy? Well, there are here a lot of poor people who are brought here from distant islands to labour as slaves for the Germans. They are not at all like the King or his people, who are brown and very pretty; but these are black as negroes and as ugly as sin, poor souls, and in their own lands they live all the time at war and cook and eat men's flesh. The Germans thrash them with whips to make them work, and every now and then, some run away into the bush, as the forest is called, and build little sheds of leaves, and eat nuts and roots and fruits, and dwell there by themselves in the great desert. Some times they are bad and wild and come down on the villages and steal and kill; and people whisper to each other that some of them have gone back to their horrid old habits, and catch men and women in order to eat them. But it is very likely not true; and the most of them are only poor, stupid, trembling, half-starved, pitiful creatures like frightened dogs.¹⁶

Stevenson writes, of course, as a contemporary witness in the discourse of his class and race, reinforcing the view that he cannot be considered as an egalitarian figure but rather must be seen as a product of his age. The basic rhetorical elements of this discourse are located in a historical frame of reference and it is important to note that resemblances exist between Stevenson and Conrad as they describe Pacific and African peoples. The proto-Modernist writer is faced with one fundamental difficulty and that is the need to find a discourse within which to describe events and processes themselves intrinsically complicated in a form accessible to the contemporary reader. It may be that Stevenson and Conrad needed to find an innovative methodology with which to address the issues of the day. The exposure to colonised peoples and the growing sense of discomfort with nineteenth-century assumptions regarding the racial superiority of white Europeans influences the literary development of both writers as will be established in later chapters, and their collocation on Jameson's fault line can be seen within this specific historical moment. That modern readers should find their chosen discourse 'racist' as Achebe¹⁷ contends is perhaps natural and rather than attempting to counter charges of racism it may prove more productive to attempt

in this study to locate the discourse in a historical and cultural context. The works of Edward Said¹⁸ and Patrick Brantlinger¹⁹ have proved invaluable in this respect and this thesis will seek to argue for Stevenson's inclusion in a cadre of writers who have focused their critical acuity on the role of Europeans in the colonies. The significance of the fore-going statement lies in the extent to which it implies the marginalisation of the subaltern subject. Neither Stevenson nor Conrad concern themselves with the experience of colonialism from the point of view of the colonised and neither can they: both are bound up in the process from the standpoint of the coloniser, and this doubtless forms the basis of Achebe's objection. Their location on the fault line relates in no small measure to their involvement in the old assumptions about race and their growing need, born of personal experience, to question those assumptions.

In this study, a distinction will be drawn between those colonies designated for European occupation and those targeted for economic exploitation. In Conrad's early novels, *Almayer's Folly* and *An Outcast of the Islands*, the Malay Archipelago is a colony coveted by the British and Dutch. Likewise, Stevenson's South Pacific is a location for British and European settlement. On the other hand, Conrad's Africa is a continent portrayed as inhospitable and threatening and consequently, according to the logic of imperialism, fit only for exploitation. Benita Parry describes colonialism as a 'a specific, and the most spectacular, mode of imperialism's many and mutable states, one which preceded the rule of international finance capitalism and whose formal ending imperialism has survived.'²⁰ The focal texts in this thesis offer insights into the two aspects of imperialism, themselves both features of 'modernity', suggested by Parry and point up the different responses of the protagonists in each situation.

The language used by Stevenson in the letter cited above resonates with the descriptive tropes used by Conrad in *Heart of Darkness*. Language is a complex issue because, as mentioned earlier, it requires relocation into an appropriate time-frame and it needs to be understood in terms of its dynamic function as a tool to separate the coloniser and colonised in both actual and literary terms. The ability of certain powerful elites within the subaltern culture to access the discourse of the coloniser is a matter for further elaboration in the body of this thesis, but following Gramsci's theory of transactional hegemony, it may be postulated that the adoption of the discourse of the powerful ruling group by the colonial Other constitutes involvement in a process denied to less powerful elements within that subaltern group. Indeed, it may be argued that often in these late-nineteenth century texts racial differentiation is less important than social class, an issue raised in both *Almayer's Folly* and *An Outcast of the Islands*, and one that is central to *The Ebb Tide*. The insistence on linguistic differentiation between the ruling elite and the subaltern is a theme central to Stevenson in both 'The Beach of Falesá' and *The Ebb Tide*. The inability of the South Seas islanders to pronounce Wiltshire's name results in the approximation: 'Welsher', and the suspicion that Wiltshire sees himself as a 'welsher', or ignoble character, is established in the reader's mind. There is a sense in which this inability to come to terms with English phonetic structures establishes a boundary between the coloniser and the colonised and the attribution of a lower cognitive classification on the latter by the former is legitimized. The Victorian mindset differentiated 'civilized' and 'savage' along lines of familiarity: the ruling group will establish its difference as a means of underpinning its hegemony.

The concluding chapter of the present study considers the extent to which shared techniques establish the sense of a shared project. Analysis of *The Ebb Tide* and *Victory* will show both structural and thematic similarities and, furthermore, will demonstrate a significant linkage in respect of a common set of symbolic values. That is to say, there are tropes common to both Stevenson and Conrad in evidence in the focal texts and these are both structural, for example in relation to narrative arrangement, and thematic in their concentration on parallel issues such as economic exploitation. The structural and thematic links illustrated in the discussion of *The Ebb Tide* and *Victory* draw on two attempts at definitions: one given by T.S. Eliot in relation to literary borrowing and the other a discussion of intertextual linkage by Allon White. Eliot, in *Selected Essays* writes about ‘borrowings’, which may or may not be allusions:

Immature poets imitate; mature poets steal; bad poets deface what they take, and good poets make it into something better, or at least something different. The good poet welds his theft into a whole of feeling which is unique, utterly different from that from which it was torn; the bad poet throws it into something which has no cohesion. A good poet will usually borrow from authors remote in time, or alien in language, or diverse in interest.²¹

The associations between *The Ebb Tide* and *Victory* which form an important element of this thesis are perhaps the product of a common project in which two writers of broadly the same epoch address the same subject; the resulting resemblances can be accounted for in this way. This thesis will examine the view that Conrad, in the manner of the ‘good poet’ identified by Eliot, adopts the ground-plan of *The Ebb Tide* and re-figures it in *Victory*, making in the process something which is similar and yet different. In ‘Joseph Conrad and the Rhetoric of Enigma’, Allon White argues that Conrad’s ‘dominant intertextual form is undoubtedly symbolic’²². The present study will seek to consider the argument that *The Ebb Tide* provides not only the structural and thematic bases for *Victory*,

but that Stevenson's text, relying as it does on the rhetorical devices of Empire writing in the late-nineteenth century, also provides the symbolic framework used by Conrad in the later novel. A discussion of these centrally important issues will take place in the concluding chapter of this thesis.

The existence of a body of rhetorical devices specific to a discussion of Empire may seem improbable but the writing of the late-nineteenth century is characterized by descriptive terms which themselves merit discussion. Those objections to Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* articulated by Chinua Achebe are important in this respect because they identify and analyse the nature of the labelling process used by writers of the period. The works under consideration in this study are the products of white Europeans who travelled to other regions of the world and tended only to see the people who originated there as objects or specimens to be observed rather than fellow human beings with their own narratives. Their purpose is to show how whites like themselves impacted on the populations they encountered. However, a significant element in the works of Stevenson and Conrad is often that which is omitted: in this sense both writers are recorders of the 'white history' of the period. The texts under consideration here address the sociology and anthropology of the South Pacific, the Far East and Africa just as surely as if they have been undertaken by contemporary, late-Victorian social scientists. Stevenson and Conrad contribute to an understanding of the prevailing attitudes in a series of texts at once complicit in, and critical of, the workings of the Empire and it is this that makes them proto-Modernists, located on the strategic fault line. Conrad and Stevenson relate to the imperialism of the late-nineteenth century in broadly similar terms, criticising the same processes and attitudes while remaining closely associated with the responsible

parties. Earlier commentators, for example John McClure, have argued that Stevenson should be considered alongside other adventure writers of the period as someone who shared their approbation of colonial ambition, while Conrad should be regarded differently:

[Indeed] Conrad's whole perspective on imperialism differed fundamentally from that of other English authors of his time and provided him with a uniquely broad view of the issues. Alone among writers like Kipling, Haggard, Henley, and Stevenson, Conrad lived both as a native of a colonized country and as a member of a colonizing community. Thus he achieved what they never could, although some, like Kipling, tried: a view from the other side of the compound wall. Having stood among the colonized, he could never accept the most basic issues of empire as resolved. As a result, while Kipling writes mostly about the conflicts involved in perfecting the techniques of imperial domination, Conrad's works explore the issue of domination itself.²⁴

The implication here is that Stevenson, an *English* author according to McClure, is to be regarded as holding the same views as Kipling in relation to the assumptions and workings of Empire. This thesis, in addition to locating Stevenson and Conrad alongside each other on the fault-line identified by Jameson, will seek to establish that Stevenson's anti-imperialist position is also to be recognised as being similar to Conrad's. Moreover, it will suggest that statements such as McClure's require to be read with an element of scepticism. Just as Conrad grew up in an environment within which he was perceived as belonging to a subordinate ethnic group, so too Stevenson may be viewed as a member of a nation viewed as subordinate by its more powerful partner in the Union. It may be argued that Stevenson's attitude to his 'Scottishness' changes during his time in Samoa and the working out of his complex relationship to Scotland is an important underlying element in the unfinished *Weir of Hermiston*. This thesis will not focus on that debate, however, but rather will argue that Stevenson's attitude to Empire and its workings is closer to that of Conrad than critics like McClure contend. Alongside issues such as miscegenation, identified

accurately by Menikoff as offensive to Victorian social *mores*, the *political* implications of Stevenson's stance were even less acceptable to the late-nineteenth-century British editor than the attitudes which threatened to undermine middle-class complacency. 'The Beach of Falesá' and *The Ebb Tide*, when read alongside *Heart of Darkness* and 'An Outpost of Progress', present a four-square opposition to the central tenets of imperialism while simultaneously allowing insight into the mindset of the ordinary individual implicated in its often banal processes.

This thesis will argue that the arrival of Conrad and Stevenson at a point of confluence in their departure from the aesthetic parameters of nineteenth-century fiction-writing described by Fredric Jameson follows a period of experimentation on the part of both writers. The first section of this study will focus on a discussion of the similarities and differences in 'The Beach of Falesá' and Conrad's Malay fiction, specifically *Almayer's Folly*, *An Outcast of the Islands* and the short story, 'Karain'. Rather than restricting the scope of the thesis to a text-by-text analysis, the method will be to develop an argument which suggests that both writers are engaged in a critical response to the excesses of late-Victorian exploitation. Furthermore, the present study will seek to demonstrate that both writers adopt parallel aesthetic devices grounded in literary modernism in pursuit of that objective. Chapter Four, *Greed and Degeneration: The Empire in Operation*, deals with issues of anti-Imperialism in 'An Outpost of Progress' and *Heart of Darkness* and considers some of the central ideas as they relate to the over-arching themes of the thesis. The concerns addressed by Conrad can be seen to be centrally important in Stevenson's earlier study of European ingression into the South Seas in *The Ebb Tide*. Chapter Five argues that this novel entitles

Stevenson to be ranked alongside Conrad as a writer experimenting with early Modernist forms. The concluding chapter seeks to re-assess a problematic Conrad text, *Victory*, alongside *The Ebb Tide*, by focusing on some structural and thematic connections. The purpose of the exercise will be to challenge some assumptions about Stevenson, such as those made by McClure, in order to establish him as a writer engaged upon a common project alongside Conrad. It is the core argument of this thesis that the on-going re-assessment of Stevenson does not demand his inclusion in a literary canon, but rather it seeks to propose the view that this under-valued and often erroneously labelled writer deserves continued and careful re-consideration.

¹ Fredric Jameson, 'Romance and Reification: Plot Construction and Ideological Closure in Joseph Conrad' in *Joseph Conrad*, ed. and with an 'Introduction' by Andrew Michael Roberts, Longman Critical Readers Series, (London & New York: Longman, 1998), pp. 201-213 (p. 202).

² Barry Menikoff, *Robert Louis Stevenson and 'The Beach of Falesá': A Study in Victorian Publishing* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1984). All subsequent references are to this edition and are given in brackets in the text.

³ Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837* (London: Vintage, 1996). All subsequent references are to this edition and are given in brackets in the text.

⁴ Michael Fry, *The Scottish Empire* (Phantassie, East Lothian: Tuckwell Press, 2001) p. 239.

⁵ *Selected Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson*, ed. by Ernest Mehew (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1997), p.367.

⁶ A full analysis of colonial expansionism is undertaken by E.J. Hobsbaum in *The Age of Empire, 1875-1914* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1987).

⁷ Neil Gunson, *Messengers of Grace* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1978)

⁸ *Accounts and Papers 1883*, (London: HMSO, 1883), VOL. XLVII, pp. 29-30.

⁹ Edward Said, 'Two Visions in *Heart of Darkness*' (1993) in *The Nineteenth Century Novel: A Critical Reader*, ed. by Stephen Regan, (London: Routledge in association with The Open University, 2001) pp. 508-517 (p.508)

¹⁰ *The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson*, ed. by Bradford A. Booth and Ernest Mehew, 8 vols (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1994-5), VII, 161-166, (161).

¹¹ Robert Weisbuch, 'Dickens, Melville, and a tale of two countries' in *The Cambridge Companion to the Victorian Novel*, ed. by Deirdre David, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 234-254 (p.236)

¹² Michel Foucault: *Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, ed. by Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), p.220.

¹³ Michael Levenson, *The Genealogy of Modernism: A Study of English Literary Doctrine 1908-1922* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p.36.

¹⁴ Alan Sandison, *Robert Louis Stevenson and the Appearance of Modernism* (London: Macmillan, 1997).

¹⁵ W.B. Yeats, *The Poems*, ed. and with an 'Introduction' by Daniel Albright (London: J.M. Dent, 1990), p. 235.

¹⁶ *The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson*, ed. by Bradford A. Booth and Ernest Mehew, 8 vols, (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1994-5), VII, 225-228 (227). Adelaide Boodle met Stevenson in Bournemouth and maintained a correspondence with the writer over a number of years. She was perhaps somewhat 'star-struck' and her book, *Robert Louis Stevenson and his Sine Qua Non* contributes to the hagiography of the early years following Stevenson's death in Samoa on December 3, 1894.

¹⁷ Chinua Achebe, 'An Image of Africa,' *Massachusetts Review* 18 (1977) 728-94.

¹⁸ Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (Chatto & Windus, 1993),

Edward Said, *Orientalism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987).

¹⁹ Patrick Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism, 1830-1914* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988).

²⁰ Benita Parry, 'Problems in Current Theories of Colonial Discourse,' *Oxford Literary Review* 9, nos 1-2 (1987) 27-58 (34).

²¹ T.S. Eliot, *Selected Essays* (1932, 1951 edn), p. 206.

²² Allon White, 'Joseph Conrad and the Rhetoric of Enigma' in *Joseph Conrad*, ed. and with an 'Introduction' by Andrew Michael Roberts, Longman Critical Readers Series, (London & New York, Longman, 1998) pp. 235-246 (p. 241).

²⁴ John A. McClure, *Kipling and Conrad: The Colonial Fiction* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981), p. 92.

‘The Beach of Falesá’: A Turning Point in Stevenson’s Fiction?

In the *Preface* to his seminal book *Robert Louis Stevenson and ‘The Beach of Falesá’* (1984), Professor Barry Menikoff makes the following telling observation in relation to an important aspect of his subject, namely Stevenson’s international standing:

Stevenson may well have been hurt by the very qualities that kept his name before a reading public for more than a century. Where the popular audience continued to revere or reflect nostalgically upon *A Child’s Garden of Verses*, or *Treasure Island*, or even an animated version of *Kidnapped*, the serious critics disregarded Stevenson altogether. In time, the academics could not be depended upon to have read the works themselves. Stevenson, living in the shadow of James and Hardy, has long been consigned to a literary never-never land.¹

Menikoff’s book on ‘The Beach of Falesá’ has made a major contribution to the on-going process of re-evaluating Robert Louis Stevenson as a major nineteenth-century writer, not least by highlighting the relevance of Stevenson’s ‘Falesá’ for present-day critical interest in colonialism. In addition to re-presenting the original text of ‘Falesá’, Menikoff accurately catalogues in his ‘Introduction’ those aspects of ‘Falesá’ which troubled the Victorian publisher of this text. Menikoff identifies the principal areas of concern as follows:

As long as Scotland served as subject, historic yet comfortable Scotland, the fiction was eulogized. The moment Stevenson turned to the modern world, to a Pacific of shipwrecks, derelict whites, and natives speaking broken English, the novels were received with suspicion and distaste. [TBF, 4]

Using Menikoff’s work as a starting-point, this chapter will explore the significance of Stevenson’s growing dissension from the objectives of

colonial expansion, a dissension articulated in ‘Falesá’ and other writings that grow out of Stevenson’s encounter with the South Seas from 1890 onwards.

Stevenson’s arrival in the South Seas marks a turning point for several reasons. His health had been a concern since childhood and it was believed that Stevenson’s delicate condition would be improved in the gentler climate of the South Pacific. However, exposure to the processes of colonial life would provide Stevenson with a new subject for his writing and so a literary turning-point can be seen to occur simultaneously with a major change in personal circumstances. Menikoff illustrates this process in a passage from his ‘Introduction’:

His cruises through the South Seas had restored him to health and vitality. More than that, they had furnished his imagination with material beyond anything he might have invented. Coral reefs, tropical mountains, endless seas, and cobalt skies. And always the people – Marquesans, Hawaiians, Gilbertese, Tahitians – all different, all polyglots, with their private myths of creation and their common history of destruction. Stevenson recognized both the immediacy and the value of his subject: the irrevocable advance of European whites throughout the Pacific, and the consequent decline of Polynesian culture. He was determined to appropriate this subject for his writing, and perhaps immortalize it through his art. [TBF, 3-4]

The novel was begun in 1890: Stevenson first refers to it in November of that year, and it appeared in book form in 1893 as part of a collection entitled *Island Nights’ Entertainments*. The novel was serialised by the *Illustrated London News* during July and August of 1892. From the outset, the text was to be problematic in a number of ways. The issues which concerned nineteenth-century editors, and threatened Stevenson’s friendship with his literary agent Sidney Colvin, are still pertinent to arguments advanced in studies of Stevenson’s late fiction. Menikoff argues persuasively that the major objections voiced by the publishers

related to the book's *subject matter*: 'miscegenation, colonialism, the exploitation of brown people, and, indeed, the very idea of the white man's presence in the Pacific.' [TBF, 5]

In 1892, Stevenson, already an internationally renowned figure, was active on behalf of the Samoans; his involvement in local politics became almost inevitable because of prominent status. In an overtly political stance against foreign influence, Stevenson wrote to *The Times* on April 23, 1894. In this correspondence, he made a plea for leniency on behalf of twenty-seven followers of the chief Mataafa who, having been involved in a major political upheaval, were subsequently beaten down by superior forces, including three German warships. Stevenson writes:

I have been called a partisan of this chief's [Mataafa], and I accept the term. I thought him, on the whole, the most honest man in Samoa, not excepting white officials. I ventured to think he had been hardly used by the Treaty Powers; I venture to think so still. It was my opinion that he should have been conjoined with Malietoa as Vice-King; and I have seen no reason to change that opinion, except that the time for it is past. Mataafa has played and lost; an exile, and stripped of his titles, he walks the exiguous beach of Jaluit, sees the German flag over his head, and yearns for the land wind of Upolu. In the politics of Samoa he is no longer a factor; and it only remains to speak of the manner in which his rebellion was suppressed and punished. Deportation is, to the Samoan mind, the punishment next to death, and thirteen of the chiefs engaged were deported with their leader. Twenty-seven others were cast into the gaol. There they lie still; the Government makes almost no attempt to feed them, and they must depend on the activity of their families and the charity of pitying whites.²

This candid appraisal of events, as he saw them, in arguably the most influential newspaper then in existence, may have altered Stevenson's profile and it can be seen from Menikoff's 'Introduction' that Stevenson's principled stand created anxieties in publishing circles. Stevenson's growing dissatisfaction with the treatment of the Samoans, with whom he was broadly in sympathy regarding their political ambitions, is central to

both his fictional and journalistic output. Virtually from the moment of his arrival in the South Seas, Stevenson is concerned about the colonial process and in ‘The Beach of Falesá’, and in his letter to *The Times* alike, he mounts a challenge to established Imperial assumptions.

The change in Stevenson’s attitude to Empire is highly significant. Prior to his arrival in Samoa, it might be argued that Stevenson was broadly in step with the view that Empire brought enlightenment to the ‘blank spaces’³ on the map. Linda Colley argues persuasively in *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707–1837* that the Scots were enthusiastic supporters of the British Empire:

For some Scots, though, it was less the job and trading opportunities that empire provided, than the *idea* of empire that proved most compelling. If Britain’s primary identity was to be an imperial one, then the English were put firmly and forever in their place, reduced to a component part of a much greater whole, exactly like the Scots, and no longer the people who ran virtually the whole show. A British imperium, in other words, enabled Scots to feel themselves peers of the English in a way still denied them in an island kingdom.⁴

Professor Colley’s study does not, however, address the late-nineteenth century and it does not therefore take account of dissenting voices such as Stevenson’s: his appraisal of events and processes marks a turning point in terms of his attitudes towards the Imperialist project. In the South Seas, he encountered experiences that affected his belief in the morality of Empire and, in ‘The Beach of Falesá’, many of his concerns are examined. The novel marks the beginning of a process in which Stevenson would further question prevailing attitudes supportive of Empire and as he literally finds himself in a new territory, so his writing also moves into a new dimension.

At the time of Stevenson's arrival in Samoa in 1890, the islands were a microcosmic representation of colonial competition. The controlling interest was German and was in the hands of *Deutsche Handels und Plantagen Gesellschaft für Süd-See Inseln zu Hamburg*: the 'German firm' as Stevenson called it. The opposition to the 'German firm' came from a group of English-speaking traders among whom Harry J. Moors, later to become a friend of the Stevensons, played a prominent role. The competitive atmosphere of Apia provided Stevenson with a realistic framework for the action of 'The Beach of Falesá'. The opposition of economic interests represented on the one hand by Case and Randall, and on the other by the newcomer, Wiltshire, personify the English-German rivalry as it appeared to Stevenson.

In 'The Beach of Falesá', Stevenson embarks on a critical appraisal of a range of attitudes prevalent in Britain in the late-nineteenth century and transported to the outer edges of the Empire by traders, missionaries and government officials. Moreover, this text marks the beginning of a period of literary output in the course of which Stevenson addresses some of the most important issues facing the late-nineteenth-century author. In particular, he deals with abuses of colonial power, exploitation in trade and the perennially difficult question of miscegenation. In addition, Stevenson highlights the fragility of the veneer of civilisation which, when removed, releases white men from their obligation to behave according to the dictates of 'polite', that is to say European, society. There are several scenes in 'The Beach of Falesá' which require analysis in order to substantiate this claim, and it will be posited that Stevenson, like

Conrad, has forceful observations to offer regarding the behaviour of Europeans abroad.

Additionally, ‘The Beach of Falesá’ is a pivotal text in the Stevenson *oeuvre* because it marks a departure from the shaping discourse of the adventure romance and moves Stevenson’s fiction in the direction of the proto-modernist novel of predicament. It must be stressed that Stevenson writes directly in response to events he has witnessed in the Pacific: the writing undergoes a major shift in both style and thematics in response to new cultural stimuli. This shift is part of a process rather than the result of a sudden, single enlightening experience, however. Stevenson had already moved in the direction of a more complex adventure fiction in *The Master of Ballantrae* (1889), and it is important to keep this process in mind when discussing the later fiction. ‘The Beach of Falesá’ does not rely *exclusively* on Stevenson’s South Seas experiences for its style, it rather represents one point on a continuum of development. This is significant: Stevenson does move into examination of new and hitherto unexplored subject matter but, as he crosses into that new territory, he carries with him established techniques and interests.

The key components in terms of the novel’s thematics are linked to a project Stevenson was running contemporaneously, that is to say, the writing of an overtly political work, *A Footnote to History: Eight Years of Trouble in Samoa*.⁵ In the latter work, Stevenson recognises both internal and external reasons for the outbreak of unrest that leads to war in the Samoan archipelago during the 1890s. As indicated above, Stevenson is sensitive to the competing commercial enterprises vying for primacy in

the lucrative copra trade, particularly the rivalry between the Germans, and the English-speaking Americans and British.

The extent to which ‘The Beach of Falesá’ departs from the earlier Stevenson fiction requires careful appraisal and, consequently, close reading. Stevenson writes in a realistic mode in ‘The Beach of Falesá’ and that alone marks a significant turning point in his writing. The final battle with Case, remarkable for its candid brutality and blow-by-blow detail, illustrates the point.

However, the exotic location, the vestigial remnants of the adventure genre associated with the rivalry between two warring parties forms a bridge to earlier Stevenson texts such as *Treasure Island* (1882) and *Kidnapped* (1886), for example.

The sense of outrage Stevenson would go on to express in his letter to *The Times* is apparent, albeit in nascent form in ‘The Beach of Falesá’. The corrosive influence of European trade on Polynesian culture is highlighted at several points in the text, especially in Case’s duping of the native population by way of coarse conjuring tricks, but also in Wiltshire’s initial complicity in the duping of Uma. There is little to recommend any of the whites as paragons of virtue: they are portrayed as representatives of an Empire that is patently corrupt.

The question of inter-racial marriage is certainly a significant element in the negative reception afforded the novel, but the wider political issues as they address exploitation and colonialism also require to be placed in context and this theme will be developed in the course of the chapter.

A key concern of this thesis is to present the argument that ‘The Beach of Falesá’ represents a turning point in Stevenson’s fiction but in positing that view, it is not necessary to suggest that the text is utterly different from all that has gone before. Stevenson, in the South Seas fiction, is aware of a new and important subject matter and he develops his fictional style in order to explore it. The result is not a matter of discarding one methodology and adopting another, rather it is a question of developing and adapting a style he had used successfully earlier. Discussion of ‘The Beach of Falesá’ will be informed by Menikoff’s work, and will focus on the text as he has now established it.

Stevenson’s adoption of a homodiegetic narrative style, which necessitates a fixed internal focalisation, ensures that all the action is filtered through the participant narrator, Wiltshire. His first impressions closely resemble Stevenson’s own reactions to his first landfall in the South Seas, reactions he outlines in *In the South Seas* (1890) and, similarly, they engender a sense of renewal:

I saw that island first when it was neither night nor morning. The moon was to the west, setting but still broad and bright. To the east, and right amidships of the dawn, which was all pink, the daystar sparkled like a diamond. The land breeze blew in our faces and smelt strong of wild lime and vanilla: other things besides, but these were the most plain; and the chill of it set me sneezing. I should say I had been for years on a low island near the line, living for the most part solitary among natives. Here was a fresh experience; even the tongue would be quite strange to me; and the look of these woods and mountains, and the rare smell of them, renewed my blood. [TBF, 115]

Wiltshire’s description is typically economical and evocative but the metaphorical equation of day-break and new hope is quickly dispelled. The sense of something other than an idyllic island location is established

early in the text and the sense of foreboding is characteristic of a movement towards a realistic portrayal of the workings of colonialism.

Wiltshire is assured that Falesá is the 'best station in the South Pacific' [115] by the captain, but is at the same time discomfited by a story of his predecessor, Adams, who, having been landed by the captain, was never seen by him again. It is a measure of Wiltshire's innocence, or naivety, that he does not immediately associate these two pieces of information and draw the obvious conclusion: there is rivalry for the copra harvest. Moreover, his straightforwardness has the effect of raising Wiltshire's moral, if not intellectual status when he is introduced to the trio of Case, the Negro and Randall. The arrival at a point 'neither night nor morning' emphasises ambivalence, and it is an ambivalence Stevenson sustains throughout the novel. Just as it is physically neither light nor dark, so it is impossible to define the margins of morality in a text which avoids absolute good and evil but itself describes the twilight, grey areas. The ambivalence established in the opening sequence is sustained and the Newtonian frame of reference characteristic of the realistic novel is subverted. The device by which Stevenson achieves this effect is a narrator who is neither consistent nor dependable in spite of the decency implied in his name, 'Wiltshire'. The name is associated with the 'heart of England' and implies a set of values bound up in sound morality. Stevenson, it may be suggested, harbours a nostalgic attitude towards the values of rural England and this may account for the choice of such an evocative name. However, the islanders cannot pronounce 'Wiltshire' and instead say 'Welsher' which has an altogether different connotation.

Wiltshire is affected by his environment: he is naturally inclined to adopt the values of the other whites on the island but, later, is moved to shame by his acceptance of their values. Wiltshire is temporarily preoccupied with the fate of his predecessor and is alarmed by the discovery that he had lost his sanity. The white man losing his capacity for rational thought whilst serving in the tropics is also a recurring theme in *The Ebb Tide*. Conrad's early fiction, and in particular *Almayer's Folly* (1895), or 'folie' if we are persuaded to the view that the import of the French word is what Conrad intended⁶, and *An Outcast of the Islands* (1896) deal with similar concerns. The same issue is most prominently focused upon in the character of Kurtz in *Heart of Darkness* (1899). It is a preoccupation at the core of much of the writing under consideration in this dissertation, and the conjunction of decaying Empire and a loss of rational framework within which to measure the extent of that decay characterises several important texts. Wiltshire's enquiry: 'Was it thought to be the island?' [116] elicits a response from the captain which suggests that there were no obvious reasons for the demise of Adams, unlike the experience of the captain's company colleague Vigours, who left Falesá because of his fear of Case and Black Jack.

The boat dispatched to collect Wiltshire is described as 'the boat that drowned Whistling Jimmie' [116], and this information increases the mounting sense of foreboding. Significantly, this is the juncture at which Stevenson brings Case and Wiltshire together. Their rivalry, soon to develop into a central theme of the novel, is here pre-figured against the background of increasing tension. The captain conveys his opinion of

Case and Black Jack: 'Yes: that's Case, sure enough, and the darkie. They've got a gallows bad reputation, but you know what a place the beach is for talking.' [116] Stevenson's use of the pejorative term 'darkie' locates the text in its time frame; it is an almost incidental reminder that he was bound by the terms of the day and another example of the difficulty in attributing early twenty-first century values to a writer of an earlier age.

As one component in the important configuration of setting, the 'beach' is a margin, not simply that belt of sand separating the land and the sea but a place of flux between races and character types. The flotsam of life itself is washed up on the 'beach' and, as a resident of Upolu, Stevenson would have known of Apia's reputation as 'the Hell of the Pacific'. However, Robert Irwin Hillier in his monograph *The South Seas Fiction of Robert Louis Stevenson* offers another interpretation of the phrase 'the beach':

With the word 'beach' Wiltshire refers to the whites dwelling on the island. The beach, as the prosperity of Case, Randall, and Jack show, need not be 'on the beach' in the sense of the trio in *The Ebb Tide*. By the end of the story Wiltshire has become the sole representative of the beach. In telling how he has succeeded, Wiltshire obliterates much of the romance of the beachcombing life.⁷

Hillier identifies 'the beach' with economic success but the incontrovertible sense of degeneration associated with Randall particularly, makes this reading problematic. Randall's decline is outlined below and it can be seen that Stevenson uses the most vivid descriptive devices to measure that decline. It is, therefore, the view of the present writer that Randall is intended to stand as an example of the degeneration which would become the subject of much late-Victorian fiction.

Stevenson associates Randall's decline closely to his abandonment of the standards of Western civilisation: the following description of the whites' domestic arrangements, as they share accommodation with the negro, illustrates the point:

The three men's beds were on the floor, and a litter of pans and dishes. There was no standing furniture, Randall, when he was violent, tearing it to laths. [TBF, 122]

Stevenson shows that the influence of whites on the South Seas islanders is by no means wholly beneficent. On his early voyages throughout the Marquesas he was made aware of entire communities having been devastated by smallpox epidemics and of subsequent depression and a growing problem of addiction to opium.⁸ The 'beach' is the locus for those who are marginalised: the drunks, the unscrupulous traders, the criminals and the lost.

In 'The Beach of Falesá', Stevenson questions the assumption that there exists a standardised system of morality, applied universally throughout the Empire. The accommodations necessary before Wiltshire can achieve a meaningful relationship with Uma, confront broader issues. For example, Stevenson addresses the compromises required where the conflicting interests of competing nations collide. Wiltshire and Uma stand as motifs for the alternative value-systems of Europe and Polynesia, and it is clear that Stevenson sought to challenge some of the pre-conceptions which abounded regarding the morality of native peoples. There is evidence of this in the introductory section of the novel when Wiltshire has to reflect on his own capacity for moral action at the point where Case suggests that he take a wife. The moral ambivalence of the

novel is further complicated by the fact that the central characters have been freed from the social conventions of Victorian England. The challenge mounted to the propriety of conventional behaviour that would be a feature of the early modernist period can be seen here in the behaviour of the traders towards the local population. The social and aesthetic norms of an earlier generation are challenged in a number of ways but most obviously in the mixed 'marriages' such as that described by Stevenson between Wiltshire and Uma.

The contrast between the idyllic imagery of Wiltshire's landfall with the scene that greets him on arrival at the island trading post is stark. Having drunk with Case aboard ship, Wiltshire is subsequently introduced to Billy Randall. Case creates the impression that he runs trade on the island, and Wiltshire is made aware that anything that happens in terms of trade on the island happens only with Case's approval. However, the earlier impression that the reader has of Wiltshire, that he is utterly unaware of the potential for evil on the island, is sustained because he fails to grasp Case's message.

Stevenson adjusts the spatio-temporal narrative to create flashback sequences which have the effect of representing a type of sensory overload that functions to destabilise Wiltshire's judgement, rather as if his arrival on the island was of itself sufficient to lay him open to new challenges and temptations. The disruption of time through flashbacks and jump-cuts characterises the opening sequences of 'The Beach of Falesá' and this technique contains elements of later modernist representations of time and space relationships such as would be described by Joyce as

‘epiphanies’, or by Woolf as ‘Moments of Being’. Stevenson’s experimental departure from earlier techniques of narrative construction charted in ‘The Beach of Falesá’ will be advanced and developed in *The Ebb Tide*. However, it might be argued that even in ‘The Beach of Falesá’, Stevenson can be seen to adjust time and space relationships as a means of distorting the linear narrative in order to create a sense of ambivalence.

Wiltshire’s first sighting of Uma is described in terms more reminiscent of one sighting an animal:

I saw one coming on the other side alone. She had been fishing; all she wore was a chemise, and it was wetted through, and a cutty sark at that. She was young and very slender for an island maid, with a long face, a high forehead, and a sly, strange, blindish look between a cat’s and a baby’s. [TBF, 119]

There are several parallels here with the Biblical story of David and Bathsheba, a tale with which Stevenson would have been familiar. The moral may be that Wiltshire will have to undertake a battle with his conscience, as did King David. Stevenson’s morally complex tale foregrounds a relationship which will both challenge the morals of Victorian Britain and provide a vehicle for the exposure of the hypocrisy at the heart of British colonialism. Menikoff is persuasive when he suggests that the reason for the blending of human and animal-like representations of Uma ‘is designed to tone down the portrait of Uma as a truly seductive woman, conscious of her body and her capacity to affect behaviour through its manipulation.’ [TBF, 83]. Not only would such a portrayal offend Victorian readers, it would radically alter the power balance between Uma and Wiltshire. It is central to the text that she has more to offer than her femininity: she offers Wiltshire an alternative set of

moral values to those laid before him by Randall and Case. The potency of Stevenson's text is embedded in the significance assigned to Uma's role as the representative of moral rectitude on the island. She is possessed of integrity unknown to the cash-fixated traders of Falesá.

That Wiltshire is exposed to this image of feminine beauty immediately before entering the dilapidated trading post occupied by Randall again serves to emphasise fundamental oppositions and further calls into question the effects of Western influence upon the islanders of Falesá. Randall is a former sea captain and the measure of his decline is apparent from Wiltshire's first observation of him:

In the back room was old Captain Randall, squatting on the floor native fashion, fat and pale, naked to the waist, gray as a badger and his eyes set with drink. His body was covered with gray hair and crawled over by flies; one was in the corner of his eye - he never heeded; and the mosquitoes hummed about the man like bees. Any clean-minded man would have had the creature out at once and buried him; and to see him, and think he was seventy, and remember he had once commanded a ship, and come ashore in his smart togs, and talked big in bars and consulates, and sat in club verandahs, turned me sick and sober.

[TBF, 120-21]

The contrasting image of this corpulent, decayed figure opposed with the lithe, cat-like Uma appears to underscore a metaphorical association of corruptive influence that is associated with the coming of the whites. The figure of the former sea-captain turned dissolute will re-occur in *The Ebb Tide* in the character of Davis. Stevenson appears to associate these characters in a symbolic way as representations of an Empire in decline. These representative figures of mercantile enterprise are portrayed as having responsible pasts in which their rectitude is a central attribute. Stevenson then focuses upon them 'beached' in drastically reduced circumstances. Here Stevenson provides a contrast to Conrad, particularly

in the figure of the mercantile marine officer. Marlow retains the attributes of his profession; he is apparently invested with clear judgement, unlike Randall or Davis, and that will have important implications in discussions of *Heart of Darkness*. It warrants mention that these authors who share so many similarities should differ in this significant respect. Conrad argues for the integrity of the master mariner as a motif of respectability and rectitude: Stevenson, in a radically different representational value-system, figures the mariner as the flotsam washed up on the beach: a symbol of degeneration. However, Stevenson complicates the issue by showing that the islanders have their own shortcomings: among them, self-interest; marriage to Wiltshire may free Uma from the taboo. By adopting a realistic point-of-view, therefore, Stevenson avoids the paternalistic and patronising attitude adopted by contemporary organisations such as the London Missionary Society whose ministers tended to treat the South Sea islanders as if they were naughty children in need of firm parenting. With that acknowledged, the abiding image of the marriage ceremony is the image of Randall. He is potent as an emblem, albeit a rather self-evident emblem, of all that is objectionable in the colonising culture. This is sharply emphasised when he is compared to Uma, a representative of the colonised society. Furthermore, Stevenson makes it clear that a relationship can never be mutually beneficial when it is operated on the basis of exploitation.

The description of the trading post, which is portrayed as a hellish amalgam of heat and dirt, foregrounds the wreckage that is Randall. Even in the midst of his disorientation, Randall is still aware of the taboo placed

upon Uma and he questions Wiltshire's choice of bride. Case, for his part, is anxious to persuade Wiltshire that Randall is raving as a result of drunkenness and therefore irrational. Significantly, Wiltshire is still not suspicious of Case's motives at this point in the narrative. Wiltshire is observant of the fact, however, that the trading post is the property of Randall and that in the event, both Case and the negro live in a parasitic relationship to the retired mariner.

In this important respect it becomes clear that Stevenson has moved the subject matter of his fiction away from the romantic high adventure of *Treasure Island* and *Kidnapped* and towards an 'adventure' based on trade and commerce. The battle being fought out in Samoa for economic primacy is represented in this text, and later in *The Ebb Tide*, as the conflict between equally undesirable elements. This is a logical development given the background of competition between colonial powers in the Pacific in the early 1890s, especially in relation to Stevenson's concerns about the effect of such competition on the indigenous culture.

Stevenson's scepticism regarding the white man's mission in the Pacific emerges early in 'The Beach of Falesá'. Only Wiltshire is remotely admirable in the context of the opening sequences and even that is a relative term, but considered alongside Randall, and more especially Case, he does appear to retain the vestiges of civilisation. His name suggests nostalgia for rural English decency and that may be an example of Stevenson's underlying belief in him as an essentially decent type. Yet, Stevenson complicates this reading: the marriage ceremony is a blatant

abuse of trust and despite his later recantation, Wiltshire enters into it willingly. The marriage troubles Wiltshire alone of the whites: the other participants with the obvious exception of Uma, treat the ceremony with contemptuous cynicism and in this contract Stevenson has his major theme: the exploitation of the native population. However, at the point at which the white traders are portrayed as scurrilous low-life, it is made clear that Uma has her own reasons for marrying Wiltshire. Marriage represents Uma's best chance of having the taboo removed. Since only Case and Randall are party to this knowledge, and Wiltshire is totally unaware of her circumstances, Wiltshire too may be said to be an innocent party. Furthermore, it may be argued that the contract which binds Wiltshire to Uma operates as a motif for all the trading which is conducted between the whites and islanders: it is essentially founded on self-interest and deception. That process, Stevenson is suggesting, results in the corruption of all the participants. An example of this bilateral process can be seen in the copra-watering episode, where both the native population and the traders are engaged in sharp practice.

Wiltshire, by the end, is placed in a predicament: Stevenson denies the possibility of closure, and this singular event in his fiction to date marks a turning-point. There is no real sense of an ending in 'The Beach of Falesá', at least in the sense of a conventional ending in an adventure tale. Instead the reader is forced to accept the reality that, until death, life is a matter of making choices between equally unpleasant, or at least confusing options. In this sense, Stevenson addresses a core concern of the modernist writer: how to explain the inexplicable.

However, before the wedding ceremony takes place there are two interludes, both of them significant in terms of the novel's textual thematics. Firstly, Uma's mother, Faavao, arrives at the trading post and Wiltshire, in response to her deranged appearance, calls out "Who in the devil's this?" [122]. This is the first reference to the diabolical, and the initially unsettling episode as it is experienced by Wiltshire prepares the reader for Case's manipulation of the local population by 'witchcraft' later in the narrative. Secondly, it is important to avoid de-historicising Stevenson in considering this episode. One of the novel's key themes is the subversion of the Victorian idea of the corruption of Western culture by the barbarian and un-Christian foreigner. Stevenson appears to suggest that cross-cultural issues are more complicated than that. This is a theme most obviously addressed by Bram Stoker in *Dracula*, and the subject of Stephen Arata's important essay, 'The Occidental Tourist: *Dracula* and the Anxiety of Reverse Colonization'⁹. Arata argues that Stoker links the enervation of the Anglo-Saxon race to the influence of the gothic vampire, but the debate can be enlarged to include, as Arata states, issues such as miscegenation. The prevailing climate of concern with regard to foreign 'invasion' of the British Isles was linked to migration rather than military conquest. As Arata points out, the burning issue of the day was the 'vexed "Eastern Question" that so obsessed British foreign policy in the 1880s and '90s.' The pragmatic concerns of the London-based politicians find their artistic representation in, among other places, the late fiction of Robert Louis Stevenson. Miscegenation would continue to present a cause for anxiety throughout the late nineteenth century and Stevenson's text re-

states and, simultaneously, challenges some of the issues central to the debate.

Faavao is a simple woman reciting poetry over her prospective son-in-law, or giving thanks for an end to the taboo, depending on the reader's capacity for scepticism. However, Wiltshire's stock response of the 'civilised' to the 'barbaric' is enlightening for the modern reader and, for the Victorian reader, must have represented a perceptibly unwholesome challenge to deeply held convictions concerning the colonial Other:

[the] Captain told me she was making up a quantity of poetry in my praise because I was to marry Uma. "All right, old lady," says I, with rather a failure of a laugh. "Anything to oblige. But when you're done with my hand, you might let me know."

She did as though she understood; the song rose into a cry and stopped; the woman crouched out of the house the same way that she came in, and must have plunged straight into the bush, for when I followed her to the door she had already vanished.

"These are rum manners," said I.

" 'S a rum crowd," said the captain. [TBF, 122-23]

Billy Randall's response to Faavao's appearance is to bless himself with the sign of the cross, a gesture which causes Wiltshire to speculate that Randall is a 'papist'. Randall, both comically and ironically in light of his drunken condition, denies Roman influence and claims membership of the 'Hard-shell' Baptists. This fundamentalist sect was opposed to an educated ministry and was particularly competitive in relation to the Evangelicals, who were another religious grouping dedicated to the salvation of the 'savages'. In having the comically unlikely Billy Randall project himself as a hard-line religious fanatic and advocate of temperance, Stevenson achieves two effects. Firstly, he identifies a parallel conflict to the trade war going on in the Pacific: that is to say, he illustrates a battle for souls fought out between the Roman Catholic Church and diverse Protestant denominations. Secondly, he highlights the

recurring theme of hypocrisy, an issue troublesome to him since his youth in Edinburgh. These two themes are central to the significance of 'The Beach of Falesá' and may lie at the root of Victorian sensitivity to the text in general. They certainly form the basis of Colvin's objections: Colvin was considerably upset by the subject matter of the novel and felt that Stevenson would ruin himself, and by extension Colvin. Having produced a controversial text so far removed from the popularly acclaimed, and profitable, early fiction, Colvin believed Stevenson to be mis-guided in his choice of subject matter for the South Seas fiction.

The marriage ceremony is a key element in Stevenson's critical attack on white influence in the South Seas and has the effect, like much else in the text, of re-focussing the debate on what constitutes 'civilised' and 'barbaric'. The wedding takes place in the dilapidated Randall trading-post, itself a symbol of decadence:

The sun was down, the sky all on fire and the lamp had been sometime lighted, when Case came back with Uma and the negro. She was dressed and scented; her kilt was of fine tapa, looking richer in the folds than any silk; her bust, which was of the colour of dark honey, she wore bare only for some half a dozen necklaces of seeds and flowers; and behind her ears and in her hair, she had the scarlet flowers of the hybiscus. She showed the best bearing for a bride conceivable, serious and still; and I thought shame to stand up with her in that mean house and before that grinning negro. I thought shame I say; for the mountebank was dressed with a big paper collar, the book he made believe to read from was an odd volume of a novel, and the words of his service not fit to be set down. My conscience smote me when we joined hands; and when she got her certificate, I was tempted to throw up the bargain and confess. Here is the document: it was Case that wrote it, signatures and all, in a leaf out of the ledger.

This is to certify that *Uma* daughter of *Faavao* of Falesá island of _____, is illegally married to *Mr John Wiltshire* for one night, and Mr John Wiltshire is at liberty to send her to hell next morning.

John Blackamoor
Chaplain to the Hulks

Extracted from the register
by William T. Randall

Master Mariner.

That was nice paper to put in a girl's hand and see her hide away like gold. A man might easily feel cheap for less. But it was the practise in these parts, and (as I told myself) not the least the fault of us White Men but of the missionaries. If they had let the natives be, I had never needed this deception, but taken all the wives I wished, and left them when I pleased, with a clear conscience.

[TBF, 123-24]

The ceremony, and in particular the wording of the marriage certificate, was the singular issue which caused Stevenson's publishers difficulty. However, the issue of Stevenson's own response to his art, particularly in relation to the question of editorial interference, or, indeed, censorship requires some elucidation. It is quite possible that in the course of his Pacific travels Stevenson had encountered evidence of episodes similar to that recounted in the foregoing extract; marriage contracts of an equally noisome cast had been effected between whites, traders, sailors, and Polynesians for decades. Stevenson had indeed addressed the issue in *In the South Seas*, especially in discussions of the relationships between Westerners and islanders:

Upon the whole, the problem seems to me to stand thus:- Where there have been fewest changes, important or unimportant, salutary or hurtful, there the race survives. Where there have been most, important or unimportant, salutary or hurtful, there it perishes. Each change, however small, augments the sum of new conditions to which the race has to become inured. There may seem, *a priori*, no comparison between the change from 'sour toddy' to bad gin, and that from the island kilt to a pair of European trousers. Yet I am far from persuaded that the one is any more hurtful than the other; and the unaccustomed race will sometimes die of pin-pricks.

[ItSS, 41]

The historical context of 'The Beach of Falesá' is fundamentally important to an understanding of its impact, and to an understanding of the butchery perpetrated by editors who attempted to remove the elements likely to prove offensive to a contemporary readership. Several strands of argument require to be advanced in relation to the issues Stevenson raises

but, in terms of the marriage ceremony, it is particularly important to consider Victorian attitudes towards family and society. The 1890s *fin-de-siècle* fiction of Stevenson, Stoker and Wilde focuses on the concerns of the age, the subversion of civilisation by barbarism as mentioned, the paranoia surrounding reverse colonisation, which is perhaps a corollary of the former, and especially sexual relations outside the bounds of wedlock. The Wilde trials of 1895 illustrate the degree of intolerance evidenced in Victorian society with regard to any alternative lifestyle, and Victorian sexual *angst* cannot be overlooked in the case of ‘The Beach of Falesá’ either. Stevenson may be suggesting that the public edifice of Victorian moral rectitude is underpinned by hypocrisy. But, even if that view is accepted, Stevenson steps beyond the bounds of convention in promoting a marriage not founded on Christian wedlock and suggesting miscegenation, fear of which was so deeply implanted in the *zeitgeist*. Stevenson could not have failed to realise the extent to which he would offend the sensibilities of the more conservative cohort of his readership but seems to have over-ridden such concerns as he had in pursuit of artistic integrity. It may be argued that Stevenson reclaims the moral ground by illustrating the growth of a real and meaningful marriage from the unpromising beginnings of the sham ceremony. This has its own irony in light of Stevenson’s responses to subsequent calls for changes made by his publishers, especially where it seems he was inclined to go along with suggestions in order to expedite payment; this apparent double standard is addressed by Menikoff:

Gradually, and without real calculation, Stevenson ceded authority over his work to other people. He asserted himself arbitrarily on occasion to state his

position: "I will not allow it to be called *Uma* in book form, that is not the logical name of the story. Nor can I have the marriage contract omitted." But in truth he had become the source of production with little control over the final product. Stevenson was a machine whose creative workings were alien to all those around him. He supplied the art: a variety of producers were involved in its finishing, marketing, and distribution. [TBF, 8]

In an important de-centring of supernatural diabolical force, Stevenson replaces the devil of his Calvinistic upbringing with corrupt mankind. For example, if Randall is a devil, he is of thoroughly human cast and his evil is greed and the practice of deception for gain. Stevenson's insistence on the Kantian categorical imperative as a central theme in 'The Beach of Falesá' is worked through in the development of Wiltshire's character which describes a journey from isolated self-interest to consideration of a wider, externalised point-of-view. To suggest that Stevenson employs the figure of a Polynesian native-girl as a catalyst for Wiltshire's 'conversion' is, perhaps, attractive: as in any relationship, there is a cross-fertilisation of influence, but Uma elicits natural responses from Wiltshire which break down his initial reserve. Following the sham ceremony, she leads Wiltshire to his house and he concedes that he feels a strong, sexual, attraction towards Uma: 'It had never taken me like that before; but the want of her took and shook all through me, like the wind in the luff of a sail.' [125] Wiltshire's reaction to this natural out-flowing of emotion is revealing, however: 'I could not speak, if I had wanted; and if I could, I would not. I was ashamed to be so much moved about a native; ashamed of the marriage too, and the certificate she had treasured in her kilt; and I turned aside and made believe to rummage among my cases.' [126]

What is significant about the change in Wiltshire is partially revealed in the fore-going passage: he responds to the simple gestures that show

Uma's dignified reaction to the marriage. Stevenson complicates the moral framework by revealing later in the narrative the possible self-interest involved in her marriage to Wiltshire but, equally, he shows that from unlikely origins, good can result.

The explicit quality of the writing is relative: none of the foregoing would be shocking to a twenty-first century reader, but it requires to be borne in mind that Stevenson was writing for a different audience. Wiltshire does not engender in the reader an awareness of a conventionally heroic figure, and his attitudes are governed primarily by a belief in the racial superiority of whites according to the prevailing dictates of Victorian racial stereotyping. Stevenson denies Wiltshire the potential for heroic status and in so doing, locates his fiction in a new framework, one which acknowledges the ordinariness of life for small men who are destined to operate on behalf of large companies or, ultimately, on behalf of imperialist national interests.

Wiltshire projects an air of decency, at least in relation to the company of Randall and Case, but it can hardly be claimed that he is moved to heroic action in the opening section of the narrative. However, the important distinction between Wiltshire, Randall and Case is that Wiltshire, as outsider, is able to evaluate the extent to which Randall and Case have undergone a process of degeneration. It is in this respect that Stevenson prefigures the relationship of Marlow to Kurtz in *Heart of Darkness* and, in Wiltshire, addresses some of the problematic situations encountered by the eponymous 'hero' of *Almayer's Folly*. It is clear that imperialism and racism are bound closely together.

Wiltshire's confusion and concern over the taboo cause him to look to the islanders for the cause: he does not suspect Case or Randall but jumps to the conclusion that the perpetrators of the threat to his trade must be the 'kanakas'. The word is itself used in an insulting manner, according to Menikoff's note: '*kanaka* - Hawaiian term for a man; also used pejoratively to signify a native (Lorrin Andrews, *A Dictionary of the Hawaiian Language* [Honolulu, 1865], p.256)' [TBF, 191]. Wiltshire uses the term pejoratively, and betrays elements of the Imperialist mind-set. In discussion with Case, Wiltshire exposes his inherent racism, and simultaneously articulates Imperialist assumptions, and this is most obvious during the meeting with the local chiefs:

I'm a white man, and a British Subject, and no end of a big chief at home; and I've come here to do them good and bring them civilisation; and no sooner have I got my trade sorted out, than they go and taboo me and no one dare come near my place! Tell them I don't mean to fly in the face of anything legal; and if what they want's a present, I'll do what's fair. I don't blame any man looking out for himself, tell them, for that's human nature; but if they think they're going to come any of native ideas over me, they'll find themselves mistaken. And tell them plain, that I demand the reason of this treatment as a White Man and a British Subject.

[TBF, 137]

Even allowing for the rising panic Wiltshire is experiencing as a result of his predicament, and admitting that consequently this speech is bluster, the assumptions of racial superiority are nevertheless obvious. Stevenson was aware of the problems of conflicts of interest between islanders and traders and had made reference to these in *A Footnote to History*. It is as if Stevenson was aware that his non-fiction writing received less attention from critics and public alike, and so the fictionalisation of the issue is undertaken to ensure that it is aired in a broader context. If that is the case, it adds strength to the argument that his fiction had outgrown its shaping

discourse and had been channelled towards a more realistic style better suited to convey the thematic concerns of the author. Furthermore, the blurring of distinctions between the writing of 'history' and 'fiction', a consideration central to a study of Stevenson in this period, requires elaboration and will be a recurring theme throughout this thesis. The relative value placed upon texts described either as factual or fictive is open to debate and the idea that history is representative, and reflective, of particular interests rather than either authoritative or objective is an important component in the structure of this study.

Prior to 'The Beach of Falesá', Stevenson's fiction had looked back into the past, usually a Scottish past in works such as *Kidnapped* or *The Master of Ballantrae*. However, in 'The Beach of Falesá', he is writing about contemporary matters in a robust and terse prose which largely eschews the conventional devices of romantic fiction. In the contemporaneous *A Footnote to History*, Stevenson is writing about events in such a way that there can be no closure: in Nietzschean terms, there can be no definitive 'historical' truth, rather there are hermeneutic pathways, or interpretations, which can be placed on events and processes. Importantly, Stevenson and Conrad appear to address the grand narrative of British imperialism from a de-centred position because of that aspect of their own relationship to it as outsiders. Both Stevenson and Conrad have prior experience of a cultural background other than that fore-grounded in the British belief in Empire. Linda Colley's valid point in relation to the enthusiastic adoption of Empire by the Scots is important in this respect because it suggests that a change of attitude on Stevenson's part had taken

place due to his direct experience in the South Pacific. Stevenson was aware of a Scottish culture, separate and unique from that to be found in England, and he drew on that culture in works such as *Kidnapped* and *Catriona*. Additionally, any literary text, ‘The Beach of Falesá’ included, will undergo a process of negotiation between text and reader inside a framework of history/histories which are not subject to closure(s), but which continue to be re-negotiated by successive generations of readers. The importance of Stevenson’s contribution to this process has not been fully acknowledged but, alongside Conrad, he may be seen as a major contributor to the anti-imperialist writing of the late-Victorian period.

A significant element of the dynamics of the ‘The Ban’ episode, occurs where Wiltshire is misled by Case in relation to the reasons surrounding the islanders avoiding his trading-post. It is Uma who explains the background to the mystery, but only after offering to leave Wiltshire and by removing herself, removing the taboo on his trade. In a tender demonstration of the dictum, *amor vincit omnia*, Wiltshire assures Uma that he values her above everything and persuades her to remain with him. He then narrates the circumstances leading up to the ban as told to him by Uma:

It seems Case encouraged them all he could, and helped to get their house built. He was very kind those days, and gave Uma trade, and there is no doubt he had his eye on her from the beginning. However, they had scarce settled, when up turned a young man, a native, and wanted to marry her. He was a small chief, and had some fine mats and old songs in his family, and was “very pretty,” Uma said; and altogether it was an extraordinary match for a penniless girl and an out-islander. [TBF, 144]

There are important insights into Stevenson’s own attitudes to white settlement of the Pacific islands in this section of the novel: he refers to

Uma's good fortune in avoiding the 'flash towns' of Apia and Papeete, for example. Stevenson's attitudes to free-wheeling beachcombers which would later become thematically central to *The Ebb Tide* are revealed and the reader of his South Seas fiction may discern thematic links which connect texts, particularly 'The Beach of Falesá' and *The Ebb Tide*. Apia on the island of Upolu, Samoa, and Papeete, on Tahiti, the capital of French Polynesia, were notorious in the 1870s and 1880s for open criminality and dissolution. That Uma has escaped these twin temples of vice is a source of great relief to Wiltshire and echoes Stevenson's own sense of revulsion. In *A Footnote to History*, Stevenson describes the effects of whites on the Samoan way of life in Chapter II: 'The Elements of Discord : Foreign':

The huge majority of Samoans, like other God-fearing folk in other countries, are perfectly content with their own manners. And upon one condition, it is plain they might enjoy themselves far beyond the average of man. Seated in islands very rich in food, the idleness of the many idle would scarce matter; and the provinces might continue to bestow their names among rival pretenders, and fall into war and enjoy that awhile, and drop into peace and enjoy that, in a manner highly to be envied. But the condition - that they should be let alone - is now no longer possible. More than a hundred years ago, and following closely on the heels of Cook, an irregular invasion of adventurers began to swarm about the isles of the Pacific. The seven sleepers of Polynesia stand, still but half aroused, in the midst of the century of competition. And the island races, comparable to a shopful of crockery launched upon the stream of time, now fall to make their desperate voyage among pots of brass and adamant. [AFH, 19-20]

Stevenson suggests in the fore-going passage that prior to white colonialism, the indigenous populations of Polynesia were settled into customs and habits with which they were comfortable and happy. The arrival of the white Europeans inevitably involved major changes that were far from beneficial to the Polynesians. That long-lasting damage was done to the social fabric of the Samoan culture is self-evident: the

influenza epidemic of 1888 was a direct result of the European presence in the South Seas, having been brought there by sailors. Never having generated any resistance to the virus, the Polynesians died in thousands. Additionally, the Europeans fomented inter-tribal strife and divided the local communities against themselves in order to gain advantage in trade. The main town of Upolu was representative of the degenerative process already underway by the time Stevenson arrived in Samoa on December 7, 1889, as he points out in *A Footnote to History*:

Apia, the port and mart, is the seat of the political sickness of Samoa. [AFH, 20]...The reader is informed that this is the proper residence of the Samoan kings; he will be the more surprised to observe a board set up, and to read that this historic village is the property of the German firm. But these boards, which are among the commonest features of the landscape, may be rather taken to imply that the claim has been disputed. A little further east he skirts the stores, offices, and barracks of the firm itself. Thence he will pass through Matafele, the one really town-like portion of this long string of villages, by German bars and stores and the German consulate; and reach the Catholic mission and cathedral standing by the mouth of a small river. The bridge which crosses here (bridge of Mulivai) is a frontier; behind is Matafele; beyond, Apia proper; behind, Germans are supreme; beyond, with but few exceptions, all is Anglo-Saxon. Here the reader will go forward past the stores of Mr. Moors (American) and Messrs. MacArthur (English); past the English mission, the office of the English newspaper, the English church, and the old American consulate, till he reaches the mouth of a larger river, the Vaisingano. Beyond, in Matautu, his way takes him in the shade of many trees and by scattered dwellings, and presently brings him beside a great range of offices, the place and the monument of a German who fought the German firm during his life. His house (now he is dead) remains pointed like a discharged cannon at the citadel of his old enemies. Fitly enough, it is at present leased and occupied by Englishmen. A little further, and the reader gains the eastern flanking angle of the bay, where stands the pilot house and signal post, and whence he can see, on the line of the main coast of the island, the British and the new American consulates. [AFH, 21-22]

Following a physical description of the town, Stevenson illustrates the extent of influence of the ‘German firm’, especially the pervasive nature of its acquisition of local land. Shortly after his arrival in Samoa, Stevenson met with Moors, a trader in partnership with a German, Grossmuhl, described by Stevenson as ‘the most infamous trader in these

waters'¹¹. The passage concludes with Stevenson's description of the British and American governmental representatives' quarters. The overwhelming impression is of the population of a small island acting as hosts to three major powers, each eager to extend its sphere of influence in the region. Stevenson's subsequent espousal of the cause of Polynesian self-determination is located in the desire to see European influence limited and held in check. This important element in his development as a writer could not, of course, occur until Stevenson had both travelled widely in the region and carried out research in relation to the power-brokering that had taken place between interested European parties in the Samoan island group. Stevenson concludes his tour around the demesne of Apia bay by showing how the different elements in the inter-racial mix apparently occlude:

The course of his walk will have been enlivened by a considerable to and fro of pleasure and business. He will have encountered many varieties of whites, - sailors, merchants, clerks, priests, Protestant missionaries in their pith helmets, and the nondescript hangers-on of any island beach. And the sailors are sometimes in considerable force; but not the residents. He will think at times there are more sign-boards than men to own them. It may chance it is a full day in the harbour; he will then have seen all manner of ships, from men-of-war and deep-sea packets to the labour-vessels of the German firm and the cockboat island schooner; and if he be of an arithmetical turn, he may calculate that there are more whites afloat in Apia Bay than whites ashore in the whole Archipelago. On the other hand, he will have encountered all ranks of natives, chiefs and pastors in their scrupulous white clothes; perhaps the king himself, attended by guards in uniform; smiling policemen with their pewter stars; girls, women, crowds of cheerful children. And he will have asked himself with some surprise where these reside. [AFH, 22-23]

However, this image of nineteenth-century Apia ill prepares the reader for the impact of Stevenson's description of how the Samoans fit into this apparent idyll:

Here and there, in the back yards of European establishments, he may have had a glimpse of a native house elbowed in a corner; but since he left Mulinu, none on the beach where islanders prefer to live, scarce one on the

line of street. The handful of whites have everything; the natives walk in a foreign town. A year ago, on a knoll behind a barroom, he might have observed a native house guarded by sentries and flown over by the standard of Samoa. He would then have been told it was the seat of government, driven (as I have to relate) over the Mulivai and from beyond the German town into the Anglo-Saxon. To-day, he will learn it has been carted back again to its old quarters. And he will think it significant that the king of the islands should be thus shuttled to and fro in his chief city at the nod of aliens.

[AFH, 23-24]

Clearly the sense of outrage Stevenson felt at the treatment of the islanders by the 'German firm' in particular, and by the representatives of colonial interests in general, permeates these extracts. *A Footnote to History* informs and colours 'The Beach of Falesá' in a basic formulation that would seem to support the view that texts may perform similar functions whether they are written as history or fiction. Essentially, both textual forms offer the reader a variety of hermeneutic pathways through a partially formed episode of history. In 'The Beach of Falesá', Case, on a metaphorical level, is typical of that face of white imperialism Stevenson finds so unacceptable. He represents the base nature of colonial exploitation and functions as a complex figure for unscrupulous commercial endeavour in the Pacific. As far as Case is concerned, the natives exist solely for the benefit of whites, and initially Wiltshire is of similar mindset until he acquires a new set of values as a direct result of his relationship with Uma. By the conclusion of the novel, Wiltshire has undergone a change that allows Stevenson to present Wiltshire and Case as the Janus-face of colonial enterprise; by extension, the acceptable and unacceptable faces of foreign capitalism.

'The Ban' episode charts Wiltshire's growing awareness of the redemptive potential of love. His 'wifie' has become a genuine object of affection rather than a hypocritically legitimised 'one night stand'.

Wiltshire has moved a considerable distance from the outlook he held at the conclusion of the ceremony in Randall's trading-post at which point, he bemoaned the missionaries' influence over the natives in matters of marriage. Here, Stevenson offers an insight into the minds of Wiltshire and his fellow traders: the missionaries are blamed for the guilt feelings the whites have in regard to the native women and this creates further ambivalence in the novel. The antipathy felt by the white traders towards missionaries is evidenced in the complex inter-play of interests between whites and the indigenous population: the missionaries are representative of European values but they act as a conscience that is undesirable to traders such as Case and Randall.

In an anaphoristic return to the location of his earlier whimsical musings, Wiltshire is placed on the verandah of his station as 'The Missionary' section of the novel opens, as if to promote him as the stereotypical 'master of all he surveys'. It is central to the concerns of the episode, however, that Wiltshire's certainty in that role is not yet, nor indeed ever, fully established; he is placed there in contemplative mood, as if he is still attempting to work out his position in relation to recent events. The arrival of the missionary, Tarleton, brings the first white man with genuine integrity into the narrative, and his arrival additionally has the effect of galvanising Wiltshire into an energetic investigation of Case's power over the commercial competition on the island¹². The corrosive influence of Case and Randall, taken together or separately, undermines the impression conjured up in the opening description of Wiltshire's landfall on an island Eden. The presence of evil is associated

with natural, not supernatural, phenomena. Tarleton functions as a counter-balance in a moral sense and his presence demands a fundamental adjustment to Wiltshire's opinion of missionaries.

The description of Tarleton's arrival demonstrates an oblique textual relationship to the fore-going citation from *A Footnote to History*, highlighting as it does the image of the missionary's uniform of 'white suit and pith helmet'. The impressive sight of the missionary aboard the native boat, carrying 'some four and twenty paddles flashing and dipping' [TBF, 147] is immediately followed by the episode which shows Case and Wiltshire clashing on the beach. Case's motive, as Wiltshire accurately surmises, is to keep him away from the missionary and, by extension, from the truth about Case's past. Wiltshire's anger, fuelled by recollections of how Case has manipulated the marriage, and, previously, has attempted to compromise Uma, erupts in a show of savagery resulting in Case being beaten by Wiltshire in view of the missionary. Wiltshire is substantially stronger than Case and the brutality of the beating is indicative of the thin veneer of civilisation covering Wiltshire's baser instincts. It is clear from his appraisal of the fight that he has relished it:

He was quick with his hands, but he had neither the height nor the weight, being a flimsy creature alongside a man like me; and besides I was blazing to that height of wrath that I could have bit into a chisel. I gave him first the one then the other, so that I could hear his head rattle and crack, and he went down straight.

"Have you had enough?" cries I. But he only looked up white and blank, and the blood spread upon his face like wine upon a napkin. "Have you had enough?" I cried again. "Speak up, and don't lie malingering there, or I'll take my feet to you!"

He sat up at that, and held his head - by the look of him you could see it was spinning - and the blood poured on his pyjamas.

"I've had enough for this time," says he, and he got up staggering and went off by the way that he had come.

The boat was close in; I saw the missionary had laid his book to one side, and I smiled to myself. "He'll know I'm a man anyway," thinks I.

[TBF, 148]

There seems to be little doubt that Wiltshire has enjoyed the humiliation of a fellow being and, in the presence of the missionary, he views the episode as evidence of his manliness. Stevenson ironically subverts the conventional, and racist, image of the native as savage by reducing the allegedly racially superior whites to willing participants in a show of atavistic brutality. This confrontation is a precursor to that which will see Wiltshire and Case matched in a fight to the death. The initial exchange between Wiltshire and Tarleton, following the physical encounter with Case, is notable for the vehemence of Wiltshire's verbal attack on missionaries as a whole, an attack which might equally have been articulated by either Case or Randall, and Tarleton's cool, but insistent rebuttal. In introducing himself, Wiltshire informs the missionary that his name is pronounced "Welsher" by the islanders, and it may be that he sees himself as having 'welshed' on Uma as a result of the marriage ceremony in Randall's trading-post. Wiltshire's desire to have Tarleton conduct a legitimate marriage ceremony would seem to support the view that he is experiencing feelings of guilt in relation to that episode. Stevenson demonstrates Wiltshire's gradual evolution towards decency in terms of his concomitant acceptance of island values. It is as a result of his respect for the beliefs of the islanders, even those beliefs and superstitions he has earlier decried, that Wiltshire comes to salvation. Eventually, his awareness of a parallel universe, functioning under an alternative set of values to that of an economically rapacious imperialism, brings Wiltshire to a reflective peace of mind. It may be argued that this is

an important part of what makes ‘The Beach of Falesá’ a ‘turning-point’ text.

In the excitement of the aftermath of the fight, the first meeting with Tarleton, and the subsequent re-marriage of Uma and Wiltshire, the implied threat in Case’s parting rejoinder on the beach has been forgotten. It is Tarleton who outlines the threat posed by Case and persuades Wiltshire of the potency of Case’s challenge to his position:

“Well,” said he at last, “I am afraid you have a dangerous enemy. This man Case is very clever and seems really wicked. I must tell you I have had my eye on him for nearly a year, and have rather had the worst of our encounters. About the time when the last representative of your firm ran so suddenly away, I had a letter from Namu, the native pastor, begging me to come to Falesá at my earliest convenience, as his flock were all ‘adopting catholic practices.’ I had great confidence in Namu; I fear it only shows how easily we are deceived.” [TBF, 152]

Stevenson handles a particularly difficult subject in this section of the novel by drawing parallels between the superstitions of Falesá and the belief system of Christianity. This is a highly significant strand in the argument that in ‘The Beach of Falesá’ Stevenson is fascinated by what he encounters in the South Seas and is determined to incorporate his findings into his fiction with a veracity and realism hitherto undiscovered. The native pastor demonstrates a facility for sophistry that is both comic and revealing of the islanders’ pragmatic understanding of the purposes of religion:

‘And I explain it, Misi,’ said Namu in this way. ‘The country in Europe is a Popey country, and the devil of the Evil Eye may be a catholic devil, or at least used to catholic ways. So then I reasoned thus; if the sign of the cross were used in a Popey manner, it would be sinful; but when it is used only to protect men from a devil, which is a thing harmless in itself, the sign too must be harmless. For the sign is neither good nor bad, even as a bottle is neither good nor bad. But if the bottle be full of gin, the gin is bad; and if the sign be made in idolatry, so is the idolatry bad.’ [TBF, 153]

Case has gambled on the islanders fear of *aitus*, or troublesome spirits, and has evidently talked the native pastor round to his way of controlling the local population. The alliance of Case and Namu functions as a metaphor for the similarly corruptive conjunction of organised religion and commercial exploitation throughout the South Seas in the latter part of the nineteenth century. A complicated arrangement of lies, half-truths and facts underpins the Case-Namu project to exploit the Falesá people in order to guarantee Case's commercial success. In *Life in the Southern Isles* (1876), by the Rev. William Wyatt Gill, there are two significant drawings, one portraying ignorant, savage islanders dancing around in war-like garb, the other, alongside the first, illustrating the idyllic pastoral scene of an orderly mission-house surrounded by contented islanders in western clothing. They are happily and industriously engaged in domestic chores, emblematic of their conversion from paganism to Christianity: the pictures portray, of course, a myth¹³. In 'The Beach of Falesá', Stevenson mounts a challenge to the grand narrative of imperialism as it is portrayed by Wyatt Gill. Central to the argument that 'The Beach of Falesá' constitutes a turning point in Stevenson's literary development is the identification of a style marked by its veracity, regardless of its effect on publishers or the reading public. The forthright nature of the writing and the adoption of a realistic discourse marks 'The Beach of Falesá' out as a pivotal text. In order to express what he considers to be important, Stevenson explores a new, realistic method for his fiction. Stevenson, it seems, risks the negative criticism of his agent, publishers, and readership in pursuit of a new discourse which suits the material at hand.

The South Seas islanders continued to believe in the local superstitions long after the arrival of the white missionaries. This was a blend that Stevenson himself could easily understand, having been brought up in the tradition of Scottish Presbyterianism and having been subjected to the creative, if not strictly doctrinal, interweaving of the discourses of Calvin and Alison Cunningham in his earliest and most impressionable years. Evil, devils, and the fear they generated were certainly as much a part of Stevenson's own formative religious experience as the *evangelium* of salvation and redemption.

The Protestant missionary, Tarleton, is himself a pragmatic man: faced with ridding the Mission of Namu or redeeming him from the influence of Case, he opts for the latter. In doing so he demonstrates a bravery which Wiltshire finds impressive, strengthening the bond between the two. Wiltshire's change of mind regarding missionaries is attributable, in part at least, to Tarleton. Stevenson uses the missionary to relate the catalogue of crimes Case has committed in the pursuit of copra: the death of the paralytic; the poisoning of Adams; the expulsion of Vigours with threats of murder. He then points out to Wiltshire that he, unquestionably, is Case's next victim. Tarleton is more than a cipher in the context of 'The Beach of Falesá': he has an obvious function in terms of propelling the narrative, but he is also an agent of change in the character of Wiltshire. 'The Missionary' chapter concludes with Tarleton advising Wiltshire that Namu is no longer inclined to cause trouble but, ominously, suggesting that Case has a new ally in Maea, one of the minor chiefs. The demonstration of Case's sleight of hand reinforces the belief that

Stevenson is eager to establish an impression of the islanders as a trusting and credulous people who are at base inclined to fear anything that cannot be explained. The potency of the impact that 'The Beach of Falesá' had on its editors had as much to do with the realisation that, in this text, Stevenson had adopted a new radicalism in his attitude towards colonial exploitation. Admittedly, it also showed that Stevenson was prepared to address issues that were explicitly concerned with sexuality or any other Victorian taboo subject, but it is in relation to exploitation that this text was new and potentially problematic. Discussions of the morality of imperialism would broaden out and would relate to 'A muddle of confused interactions, or a model of global control' as Elleke Boehmer argues in her 'Introduction' to *Empire Writing: An Anthology of Colonial Literature 1870-1918*¹⁴. In relation to the Victorian readership, however, it may be assumed that discussion of colonial exploitation was itself a taboo subject. If that argument has validity, then Stevenson is, by definition, involved in a similar project to that undertaken by Conrad in *Heart of Darkness*. Belief in the imperial project is such in the late-nineteenth century that dissension from the view that whites brought only the purifying influence of Christianity might have been problematic. Dissension comes in the works under consideration here and, in Stevenson's case, the cost can be seen in terms of the negative reaction previously discussed. This is a key issue: Stevenson seems to suggest here that colonial exploitation is largely based on deceit, on a conjuring trick such as Case's with the coin, and this supposition alone marks out the text as a work fundamentally critical of European advantage-taking. The

development of the case against imperialism would come to maturity in *The Ebb Tide*, but the process is underway in 'The Beach of Falesá'.

Case functions as an adjunct to the core metaphor of Randall as the corruptive centre from which emanates a destructive and exploitative influence. This malign influence threatens to strangle the life from island traditions. Tarleton has confirmed Wiltshire's suspicions regarding Case's motives and the concluding paragraphs of 'The Missionary' anticipate the challenge to, and destruction of, Randall and Case's dominance. Wiltshire's peace can only be achieved through the catharsis of conflict.

A further examination of the thematics of 'The Beach of Falesá', particularly important in the analysis of the concluding section, may help to illustrate to what extent this text describes a new direction for Stevenson's fiction. Following on from the meeting with Tarleton, Wiltshire experiences a period of domestic quietude in the company of Uma, Faavao her mother, and the occasional visitor Father Galuchet the French priest, whose attempts to teach Wiltshire both native and French create a Babel on Wiltshire's verandah. There is a glimpse of a multi-cultural ideal at work in the harmonious relationship of different nationalities, but it is soon undercut in dramatic fashion. Stevenson has established the idea that a harmonious relationship between the indigenous population and the whites is both possible and desirable. The emphasis is on the notion of co-operation and raises interesting issues in relation to Stevenson's own experience on Samoa. 'Devil-Work' explores more fully Case's hold over the islanders, and demonstrates Wiltshire's ability to subvert Case's influence by rational, empirical means. The

islanders' beliefs are partly constructed of western Judaeo-Christian tradition, but there is the realisation that local superstitions may well prevail after dark. The belief that Case has supernatural powers is put to Wiltshire by Uma, following on from a conversation Wiltshire has had earlier with an islander, in which the man has told Wiltshire about the area of the island that is occupied by a malign spirit. In another illustration of the naivete of the islanders, Wiltshire elicits the information from Uma that Case, unlike the native population, can come and go in this place: therefore Case is a *Tiapolo*. The illogicality and irrationality of this belief system, Stevenson may be suggesting, lays the islanders open to Case's unscrupulous exploitation.

Stevenson, in a comic interlude, highlights the conflicting cultures of Uma and Wiltshire and, more importantly, shows how Case is able to rule the island in spite of the local chiefs. Case is able to bypass the influence of the missionaries by appealing to ancient superstitions and, importantly, by being physically present in Falesá. Uma's scepticism regarding the protective power of Victoria is linked to her geographical remoteness from the issues affecting Falesá; Maea is more significant in local terms than the Empress of India. Here Stevenson articulates the naivety of Uma and the on-going commercial exploitation of the islands by people like Case, who, while not acting in the name of Empire, personify the assumptions of racial superiority in relation to the colonial 'Other'. Of course, in straight-forward terms, the balance of power lies with Case as a representative of the dominant cultural force because he uses methods that are alien to the islanders: for example, deception and outright force to

bring about the desired results. Stevenson portrays an opposition of value-systems within which the participants simply do not understand the basis upon which the other functions.

Wiltshire goes on to expose Case's 'devil-work' as hocus-pocus and harmless, a collection of masks, wind-chimes and luminous images calculated to ward off any brave enough to enter into Case's 'desert'. Stevenson's word-choice is interesting in the description of this 'no-man's land': 'desert' is an unlikely label to apply to a tropical island. It may be concluded that he means to emphasise the absence of people rather than the physical appearance of the place; what is here is a symbolic 'Waste Land'. On one level there exists Case's chicanery, on a deeper level there is the metaphor for the corrosive force of colonialism which effected, intentionally or recklessly, depopulation throughout the Polynesian archipelago. Case's ploy functions as an on-going symbol of the mish-mash of empty promises, threats and straight-forward lies used to keep the native population in hegemonic subordination to imperialist ambition.

Maea, the 'small chief', enters into a trading agreement with Wiltshire when Case's 'devil-work' is exposed. The benefit to Wiltshire is immediately apparent, and Stevenson suggests that the islanders also benefit due to Wiltshire's efforts in the business of Case. It is clear, of course, that Wiltshire is not motivated by any altruistic notion, as is shown in the parting of himself and Maea, at the conclusion of the chapter:

This time he was so pleased he had to try his English again, "You talk true?" says he.

"Rather!" said I. "Talk all-e-same bible. Bring out a bible here, Uma, if you've got such a thing, and I'll kiss it. Or I'll tell you what's better still,"

says I, taking a header. "Ask him if he's afraid to go up there himself by day."

It appeared he wasn't; he could venture as far as that by day and in company.

"That's the ticket, then!" said I. "Tell him the man's a fraud and the place foolishness, and if he'll go up there tomorrow, he'll see all that's left of it. But tell him this, Uma, and mind he understands it; if he gets talking, it's bound to come to Case and I'm a dead man. I'm playing his game, tell him, and if he says one word, my blood will be at his door and be the damnation of him here and after.

She told him, and he shook hands with me up to the hilts, and says he: "No talk. Go up tomorrow. You my friend?"

"No sir!" says I. "No such foolishness. I've come here to trade, tell him, and not to make friends . [TBF, 173-74]

Stevenson leaves the reader in no doubt regarding Wiltshire's motives at this juncture. He is an unreconstructed capitalist seeking to end an episode of unfair competition; there is nothing moral or noble about his actions. He stands apart from the locals, and is different to Case, only in the methods he uses to get what he wants. This element of the novel contributes to the overall problem of where it fits into the Stevenson *oeuvre*: with the benefit of hindsight it can be posited that 'The Beach of Falesá' marks the beginning of the proto-modernist phase of Stevenson's career. This text is realistic, and that fact accounts for its negative reception, as Menikoff illustrates in his 'Introduction': "Stevenson here introduces a theme that he was to echo regularly in his comment on this story: its veracity, its realism." [11] In addition to its status as a realistic short novel, it may be argued that the text may be read as a moral tale. This perception may result from the transformation that occurs in Wiltshire in the concluding chapter. 'Night in the Bush'.

The climactic events of the last encounter between Wiltshire and Case reinforce the argument that Stevenson casts doubts on the moral status of Wiltshire and in so doing, he invites the reader to conclude that Wiltshire

is essentially of the same cast as Case. Stevenson's point is that both are products of the same discourse of imperialism and their own commercial success is important to them. However, in Wiltshire's example, there is the suggestion of moral progress. The husband of the final chapter is not the bridegroom of the scandalous interlude in Randall's trading-post. Certainly, also, there is sufficient textual evidence to support the view that Wiltshire retains the Victorian belief in a racial taxonomy that places the white man at the top of the evolutionary ladder and the black man at the bottom. Nevertheless, 'The Beach of Falesá' may be a moral tale without the central character being an exemplary figure throughout. In this respect, Stevenson's own position is interesting: he is at once a critic of imperialism and local laird of some four hundred acres on Upolu at the time of writing 'The Beach of Falesá'. This is an irony most certainly, but it is also another example of the helical face Stevenson presents in his insider-outsider role in the workings of empire. In the final chapter, Wiltshire sets out to destroy Case, on one level by removing the totems of fear but, ultimately by killing him and removing the competition he poses to Wiltshire's own commercial enterprise. Any critic arguing for Wiltshire's status as a moral figure might usefully re-read the concluding chapter, bearing in mind that in this first-person narrative, Stevenson adopts a method which allows Wiltshire to reveal his true motives; there is very little evidence of any moral action to adduce.

Wiltshire arms himself with explosives in preparation for the destruction of Case's hill-top 'temple' and reveals the nature of the white merchant in utterly unambiguous terms:

And then there was the real plant of the affair in hand, a mortal weight of gunpowder, a pair of dynamite fishing-bombs, and two or three pieces of slow match that I had hauled out of the tin cases and spliced together the best way I could; for the match was only trade stuff, and a man would be crazy that trusted it. [TBF, 176]

Stevenson shows the impact of exploitation in a matter-of-fact and understated way in this extract. Wiltshire is a diluted version of Case; both are conjoined in the contempt they demonstrate for the native population. Case's bare-toothed aggression finds a softer image in Wiltshire's more diffident style, but both are products of the same culture. Stevenson reinforces this view in the preamble to the explosion, where Wiltshire is speculating about the efficacy of his planning, and of the explosive detonator:

If I could have trusted the match, I might have run in still and rescued it. But who was going to trust the match? You know what trade is; the stuff was good enough for kanakas to go fishing with, where they've got to look lively anyway, and the most they risk is only to have their hand blown off; but for any one that wanted to fool around a blow-up like mine, that match was rubbish. [TBF, 180]

The emphasis on trade is clear: Wiltshire weighs in his mind the risk involved in retrieving the lantern and abandons the plan because of the dangers implicit in using shoddy materials. After all, these slow fuses were never intended for use by white men, but to be traded in return for the natives' copra. This unequivocal indictment of imperialist assumptions ought to be enough to relocate 'The Beach of Falesá' alongside Conrad's much more readily acknowledged 'anti-imperialist' discourse in *Heart of Darkness*: both texts seek to connect several strands of Eurocentric commercial exploitation. The on-going process of re-evaluation seeks to

secure for Stevenson the status enjoyed by Conrad as an important critic of imperialism.

‘The Beach of Falesá’ deals with the same concerns Conrad addresses in his early novels, particularly *Almayer’s Folly* and *An Outcast of the Islands* and the similarities in thematics are underpinned by the same cultural assumptions. Wiltshire defeats Case, but the reader is left feeling that the changes that occur as a result, as far as the islanders are concerned, amount to whether they are to be exploited by a smiling face rather than a snarling face. It may be argued that Wiltshire experiences a ‘conversion’ at the end of the novel, and his attitudes undoubtedly change, for example in relation to Uma. The process is far from straightforward, however. Wiltshire does undergo a transformation but the extent to which change is wrought as a result of one man’s altered attitude is limited. Stevenson clearly favours the transformed Wiltshire over Case and in the fight-to-the-death scene, a number of issues warrant examination.

Following the explosion, the forest is lit up and Case is able to inflict injury on Wiltshire by shooting at him with a Winchester rifle. This weapon is very much a product of its time. It represents the arrival of a lethally efficient instrument of death, allowing several rounds to be fired by its lever-action ‘repeater’ technology. In the context of this thesis it is the impact of that technology, a modern technology at that, upon a peaceful civilisation which is important. Stevenson kept several Winchesters at Vailima during the Samoan unrest. For the present day reader, it is the weapon of the aggressor and the colonist: for the reader of the 1890s it is associated with ‘state-of-the-art’ technology, and it is

significant that Stevenson makes reference to the 'Winchester' carried by Case rather than using the weaker term, 'rifle'. In the author's mind, the nomenclature is clearly imbued with significance because Stevenson refers to the 'Winchester' by name five times in as many short paragraphs. Importantly, the Winchester links Case to the modern, advanced world of Empire rather than to the old, pre-Imperial South Seas world of Polynesian custom: that is, to the world of Uma.

The fascination with contemporary technological developments is associated with literary modernism and just as *Dracula* associates technology, and the ability to operate it, with the emergent New Woman as evidenced in the case of Mina Harker, so Stevenson attaches especial significance to the technology of firearms.

Wiltshire finally overpowers Case and the fight-to-the-death scene is as atavistic an encounter as any described in Stevenson's fiction. It is, however, reminiscent of the fight between Jim Hawkins and Israel Hands in *Treasure Island*, a further example of the notion of development rather than departure in Stevenson's literary output. The episode contrasts starkly with Attwater's clinically detached shooting of the fugitive servant in *The Ebb Tide*. Wiltshire experiences entirely different emotions:

I was all as taut as a ship's hauser or the spring of a watch; and as soon as he came within reach of me, I had him by the ankle, plucked the feet right out from under him, laid him out, and was upon the top of him, broken leg and all, before he breathed. His Winchester had gone the same road as my shotgun; it was nothing to me; I defied him now. I'm a pretty strong man anyway, but I never knew what strength was till I got hold of Case. He was knocked out of time by the rattle he came down with, and threw up his hands together, more like a frightened woman, so that I caught both of them with my left. This wakened him up, and he fixed his teeth in my forearm like a weasel. Much I cared! My leg gave me all the pain I had any use for; and I drew my knife, and got it in the place.

"Now," said I, "I've got you; and you're gone up, and a good job too. Do you feel the point of that? That's for Underhill. And there's for Adams. And

now here's for Uma, and that's going to knock your blooming soul right out of you."

With that, I gave him the cold steel for all I was worth. His body kicked under me like a spring sofa; he gave a dreadful kind of low moan, and lay still.

"I wonder if you're dead. I hope so," I thought, for my head was swimming. But I wasn't going to take chances; I had his own example too close before me for that; and I tried to draw the knife out to give it him again. The blood came over my hands, I remember, hot as tea; and with that I fainted clean away and fell with my head on the man's mouth.

When I came to myself, it was pitch dark; the cinders had burned out, there was nothing to be seen but the shine of the dead wood; and I couldn't remember where I was, nor why I was in such pain, nor what I was all wetted with. Then it came back; and the first thing I attended to was to give him the knife again a half a dozen times up to the handle. I believe he was dead already; but it did him no harm and did me good. [TBF, 182-83]

Stevenson depicts here a scene of the utmost bloody savagery, a battle between two brutal men removed from the constraints of civilising culture, resulting in murder and the subversion of civilisation. By killing Case, Wiltshire is able to trade with Maea. The fundamental concern with trade is maintained as a primary theme, and the roles of white man and native are reinforced in the process, as the victor Wiltshire imposes his will on the passive Maea. Perhaps the most significant factor is Stevenson's portrayal of Uma in this scene: she is the most civilised person in the encounter. The conventional, Imperial view which opposes 'savage' and 'civilised' is being subverted by surprisingly savage Europeans and by surprisingly civilised 'natives'. This may be the means by which Stevenson effects the moral development of Wiltshire: he is saved, in a sense, by the influence of Uma.

With the return of Tarleton, Case is buried and his business papers seized; it is apparent that Case has left everything to his native 'wife' who has abandoned Falesá, as have Randall and Black Jack. Stevenson complicates the denouement here by revealing a side to Case hitherto

concealed from the reader. It appears that even the hard-boiled Case has been affected by his exposure to the island women, further emphasising Stevenson's insistence on the redemptive qualities of the indigenous population. The final paragraphs of the novel further emphasise several central themes, particularly the continued decline of the emblematic Captain Randall:

As for Randall and the black, they had to tramp; got into some kind of a station on the Papa-malulu side; did very bad business, for the truth is neither of the pair was fit for it; and lived mostly on fish, which was the means of Randall's death. It seems there was a nice shoal in one day, and papa went after them with dynamite; either the match burned too fast or papa was full, or both, but the shell went off (in the usual way) before he threw it; and where was papa's hand? Well, there's nothing to hurt in that; the islands up north are full of one-handed men, like the parties in the Arabian Nights; but either Randall was too old, or he drank too much, and the short and the long of it was that he died. Pretty soon after, the nigger was turned out of the islands for stealing from white men, and went off to the west, where he found men of his own colour, in case he liked that, and men of his own colour took and ate him at some kind of a corroborree and I'm sure I hope he was to their fancy!

[TBF, 185]

Wiltshire's summary of the foregoing is difficult to reconcile with the near sentimental and reflective mood of the final paragraph. Stevenson uses the language of 'the beach', as formulated by Hillier, in describing the demise of Randall and the negro and, in the latter case, it is undeniably racist. In spite of the benign influence of Uma, Wiltshire remains to an extent unreconstructed, and perhaps Stevenson himself is still caught up in attitudes he is slowly beginning to see through and to attack. Stevenson had himself visited a cannibal site in the Marquesas and equated the practice with uncivilised, lower life forms. Describing this visit in *In the South Seas*, Stevenson writes:

The higher Polynesian races, such as the Tahitians, Hawaiians, and Samoans, had one and all outgrown, and some of them had in part forgot, the practice, before Cook or Bougainville had shown a top-sail in their waters. It lingered only in some low islands where life was difficult to maintain, and

among inveterate savages like the New Zealanders or the Marquesans.
[ItSS, 94]

We may be able to distinguish between Wiltshire's voice and that of Stevenson. However, the fact remains - the two voices have something in common.

Should the critic be inclined to dismiss the inherent racism in these lines by invoking Stevenson's characteristic 'irony', he should miss the point. One cannot avoid the unpleasant but nevertheless stark truth that Stevenson is a product of his culture, and as such, he is thirled to the discourse of that culture. The language of journalism and fiction is not all that different when it is addressing issues of 'them' and 'us'.

The return of Tarleton to Falesá brings unwelcome responsibilities for Wiltshire:

I must say Mr Tarleton did the right thing by us; but he took a meanish kind of revenge.

"Now, Mr Wiltshire," said he, "I've put you all square with everybody here. It wasn't difficult to do, Case being gone; but I have done it, and given my pledge besides that you will deal fairly with the natives. I must ask you to keep my word."

Well, so I did. I used to be bothered about my balances; but I reasoned it out this way. We all have queerish balances, and the natives all know it and water their copra in a proportion; so that it's fair all round. But the truth is, it did used to bother me; and though I did well in Falesá, I was half-glad when the firm moved me on to another station, where I was under no kind of a pledge and could look my balances in the face. [TBF, 186]

Wiltshire accepts Tarleton's pledge with reluctance preferring to be free to consider only profit; profit which ultimately goes to his employers rather than to himself. The Conrad short story 'An Outpost of Progress' addresses similar arrangements and likewise emphasises the relativity of power relationships as a result of which the 'little man' is himself exploited by the machinery of capitalistic imperialism. However,

Wiltshire's predicament is not based upon the personal greed of Case or Randall but the acquisitive capitalism of imperial power played out through its lackeys. Wiltshire bemoans Uma's generosity, "if you don't keep your eye lifting, she would give away the roof off the station. Well, it seems it's natural in kanakas." [186] Wiltshire is stranded on the margins of two cultures; he is like Almayer, looking to find wealth in the West but destined to remain where he is, in an outpost of Empire:

My public house? Not a bit of it, nor ever likely: I'm stuck here, I fancy; I don't like to leave the kids, you see; and there's no use talking – they're better here than what they would be in a white man's country. Though Ben took the eldest up to Auckland, where he's being schooled with the best. But what bothers me is the girls. They're only half-castes of course; I know that as well as you do, and there's nobody thinks less of half-castes than I do; but they're mine, and about all I've got; I can't reconcile my mind to their taking up with kanakas, and I'd like to know where I'm to find them whites? [TBF, 186]

Wiltshire's apparent dismissal of his daughters as 'only half-castes' is tempered by his subsequent acknowledgement of them as, nevertheless, his own. This may be a manifestation of the practical nature of his redemption. Alternatively, perhaps, the passage simply illustrates an example of a change of emphasis in expression from Victorian English to the present day, but there are implications despite the time factor and the relative values of language across the years. Once again, significantly in the concluding lines, Stevenson emphasises the importance of race and conflicting cultural pressures on the white man abroad.

It would be possible to argue that Wiltshire is, finally, reconciled to his predicament, and to conclude that Stevenson has created a character stoically resolved to do the best he can in the circumstances. This simplifies and diminishes Stevenson's achievement. Wiltshire is far more complex and, in this respect 'modern', in that he is at once able to

condemn the islanders, the missionaries, Randall, Case but also, significantly, he condemns himself. Menikoff, in his study of the language of 'The Beach of Falesá', points out Wiltshire's self awareness in discussion of the oath "god-damned":

When he says he is a "god-damned white man and British subject," that is exactly what he means – that he is condemned by a system to perdition and he knows it. The only admirable thing about the statement is its honesty of feeling and expression. To Wiltshire being "plain" is a virtue.

What Stevenson provides here is not merely an oath offensive in its clarity and unrelieved plainness, but an attack on the entire class system, economic and political, that is at the center of *Falesá*. Common, low, white, British, *kanaka*, trader, missionary – these terms are critical in the novel; indeed they are what the novel is all about. Wiltshire is at one and the same time a representative of the system (dispensing rubbish to the natives, exploiting their copra, trafficking in their women) and a rebel against it (marrying a *kanaka* girl and upholding an elemental standard of decency and honor). [TBF, 80-1]

Menikoff rightly emphasises the importance of understanding the central significance of word-choice in conveying the extent of Wiltshire's predicament: he is at once of the system and opposed to it. It is a 'modern' problem: Wiltshire experiences the forces of culture and counter-culture pulling him in opposite directions. His apparent resignation to his station in life is associated with considerations about his children that continue the debate on race and miscegenation. Instead of looking to the metaphysical for manifestations of evil as, for example, in the character of James Durie in *The Master of Ballantrae*, Stevenson finds evidence of that evil in the mundane world of commercialism. However, Stevenson seems to promulgate a view in 'The Beach of Falesá' that is to be found in late-nineteenth-century thinking relating to post-Darwinian science, regression and reverse colonisation. The evils relate to the promotion of racial paradigms that relegate non-Caucasians to the lower life forms, an idea

central to much of the thinking which empowered European expansionism.

The extent to which Stevenson was equipped to make objective statements with regard to the above is, of course, limited by the very attitudes he sought to challenge as can be seen from the accounts of visits to cannibal sites in the Marquesas cited earlier.

‘The Beach of Falesá’ did much to question the assumptions of late-nineteenth-century commentators and as a result brought Stevenson notoriety. However, it had the positive effect of creating a realistic picture of late-nineteenth-century colonialism and it establishes Stevenson as a writer moving towards Modernist preoccupations with issues such as originality and aesthetic experimentation. Despite the negative responses to his novel, Stevenson was convinced of its merit. In a letter to Edward Burlingame dated January 2, 1892, he writes:

McClure is publishing a short story of mine, some 50,000 words, I think. ‘The Beach of Falesá’; when he’s done with it, I want you and Cassell to bring it out in a little volume; I shall send you a dedication for it: I believe it good; indeed, to be honest, very good. Good gear that pleases the merchant.¹⁵

Stevenson never revised this early opinion of ‘The Beach of Falesá’ believing it to possess a ‘queer realism’. Henry James shared Stevenson’s enthusiasm for the novel:

The art of *The Beach of Falesá* seems to be an art brought to perfection and I delight in the observed truth, the modesty of the nature of the narrator....primitive man doesn’t interest me, I confess, as much as civilised - and yet he does, when you write about him.¹⁶

It is significant that James makes reference to the ‘uncivilised’ and expresses his distaste for the subject in general terms. Stevenson’s straight-forward treatment of the sexual attraction Wiltshire feels for Uma

may have offended James, whose own style would not have allowed such an open discussion of one of the Victorian taboos. However, the positive nature of James's response is unconditional in its support of Stevenson's method.

In Wiltshire, Stevenson creates a representative of exploitative colonialism who is left in an ambivalent relationship both to his past and to his future. He can neither slough off the attitudes of his previous life, nor can he fully give himself over to his new situation. He is caught in a time-bend, but importantly, he accepts his responsibility to Uma and his children, and dismisses ideas of returning to England. The dislocation of time and place and the frustration of intention due to circumstance makes 'The Beach of Falesá' a hybrid, indeed an experimental text, not fully representative of the modernist novel, yet significantly more dependent on psychological internalisation than anything Stevenson had previously written. The adventure story is here elevated to a level which prepares the way for the early fiction of Conrad, and the maturation of this process in *The Ebb Tide*, particularly in the characterisation of Attwater, prefigures Almayer, Kurtz and Heyst. The use of the term 'hero' to describe these Conradian figures is singularly inappropriate, but no more so than to attempt to ascribe heroic qualities to Wiltshire, Herrick, Huish, Davis or Attwater.

Stevenson's development of the search for adventure into a new area, namely commerce, is closely linked to his growing antipathy towards what he increasingly believed to be the rotten core of imperialism. That Stevenson should have chosen to write about these men in a realistic and

highly critical way is sufficient proof of his disillusionment. The South Seas texts run against the grain of the jingoistic discourses of the British press and in them Stevenson challenges all the hackneyed sensibilities of Victorian Britain. The contribution of Menikoff's scholarship in this respect is extremely important. 'The Beach of Falesá' as Stevenson wrote it, only became available in the mid-1980s. The butchery to which it was subjected is indicative enough of its impact and it is important to note that this text is a centrally important event in the process which would be further developed by Conrad. Stevenson's achievement in the role of groundbreaker has only recently been acknowledged, largely due to the efforts of scholars such as Menikoff, Calder and Mehew. The confinement of Stevenson within 'Scottish' literary studies in university departments has not helped to create a climate in which his work and especially his later work, might be seen as contributing to, and connecting with, a far broader tradition of writing engaged in the production of the proto-modernist novel.

Stevenson's ability to analyse the inter-relationships of whites and islanders in the competition of colonial and colonized cultures is linked to his distancing from the British, or perhaps more specifically, the English mind-set of the late-nineteenth century. The relationship of Scotland to England had fascinated Stevenson from his youth and, like Conrad, his own background is at a remove from that, for example, of Kipling, although Kipling, having roots in India and England, is also in a complex situation. Stevenson's apprehension of the negative aspects of Empire and his awareness of the unwholesome realities under-pinning the grand

narrative of imperialism form the basis for his critique in 'The Beach of Falesá'. When viewed alongside the early works of Joseph Conrad, this important text supports the argument that Stevenson should be considered as Conrad's co-critic of imperialistic exploitation.

¹ Barry Menikoff, *Robert Louis Stevenson and 'The Beach of Falesá': A Study in Victorian Publishing with the Original Text* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1984), p.vii. All subsequent references are to this edition and are given within brackets in the text.

² *The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson*, ed. by Bradford A. Booth and Ernest Mehew, 8 vols, (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1994-5), VIII, 267-276, (268).

³ Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (New York & London: W.W Norton & Co., 1988), p.11.

⁴ Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837* (London: Vintage, 1996), p.136.

⁵ Robert Louis Stevenson, *A Footnote to History: Eight Years of Trouble in Samoa* (London, Paris & Melbourne: Cassell & Co. Ltd., 1892).

⁶ In his 'Introduction' to *Almayer's Folly* in the Cambridge Edition of the Works of Joseph Conrad, Ian Watt makes the suggestion that the French '*folie*' means 'madness' rather than 'foolishness'. See: Joseph Conrad, *Almayer's Folly* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) p. lx.

⁷ Robert Irwin Hillier, *The South Seas Fiction of Robert Louis Stevenson* (New York: Peter Langs, 1989), p.167.

⁸ For a full discussion, see: Robert Louis Stevenson, *In the South Seas* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1912), pp. 26-44.

⁹ Stephen D. Arata, 'The Occidental Tourist: *Dracula* and the Anxiety of Reverse Colonization', *Victorian Studies*, 33/4 (1990), 621-45.

¹⁰ Frank McLynn, *Robert Louis Stevenson, A Biography* (London: Hutchison, 1993), p.368.

¹¹ Tarleton is based on a London Missionary Society preacher, William Clarke, whom Stevenson met in Samoa during Clarke's second period of service in Apia. His Samoan name was 'Talati'.

¹² The images referred to appear in: Patrick Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism, 1830-1914* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1988), p.18.

¹³ Elleke Boehmer, ed. *Empire Writing: An Anthology of Colonial Literature 1870-1918* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p.xvi.

¹⁴ *The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson*, ed. by Bradford A. Booth and Ernest Mehew, 8 vols, (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1994-5), VII, 224-25.

¹⁵ Janet Adam Smith, ed., *Henry James and Robert Louis Stevenson* (London, 1948), p. 230.

Towards Modernism: Conrad's Early Fiction

Conrad's status as a critic of imperialism may be said to rest on the critical attention generated by *Heart of Darkness* (1899). This thesis will seek to propose the view that the short story 'An Outpost of Progress' (1898) may be considered alongside *Heart of Darkness* as an indictment of European imperialism, and that both works develop from Conrad's earlier fiction, specifically *Almayer's Folly* (1895) and *An Outcast of the Islands* (1896). It will be the principal theme in the present chapter that both *Almayer's Folly* and *An Outcast of the Islands* are to be viewed as *proto-modernist* texts, since neither possess the formal structures of later modernist writing. However, both texts represent a tentative attempt towards a reformulation of adventure writing in the closing years of the nineteenth century.

Conrad undertook the writing of *Almayer's Folly* at a point when his merchant navy career was becoming an increasing source of frustration to him. In an essay on *Almayer's Folly* and *An Outcast of the Islands*, Leonard Orr advances the following argument:

The writing of these first two novels coincided with Conrad's confrontation with his failing career and with his acceptance of the need to change; at this same time, there is the death of Conrad's maternal uncle and financial protector, Tadeusz Bobrowski. Ian Watt, Albert Guerard, and Bernard Meyer have all argued that this accounts for the overall atmosphere of death and demoralization in these works (see Najder 1983, 167; Watt, 1979, 70). Meyer and Guerard both see that Conrad's completion of the manuscript of *Almayer's Folly* so soon after the death of Bobrowski, after four years of work, is because of the removal of the 'inhibiting substitute father.' Najder points out, however, that at the time of his uncle's death, February 10, 1894, Conrad 'was less than three chapters from the end, and that while his literary and intellectual interests grew steadily, his enthusiasm for work at sea was waning. Thus, his concentration on the book was at least partly the continuation of a natural process.'¹

Published in 1895, the year after Stevenson's death, *Almayer's Folly* was Conrad's first full-length work of fiction. Work on the novel began in September 1889, while Conrad was on a lengthy shore leave in Pimlico. The subject matter, and the genre of exotic romance, bears a close resemblance to Stevenson's 'The Beach of Falesá' (1893) and important thematic links to the Stevenson text are present in *Almayer's Folly*. The purpose of this chapter will be to trace connections between two writers sharing common interests as they challenge some of the central concepts of the grand narrative of imperialism.

Ian Watt's analysis in *Conrad and the Nineteenth Century*² of possible connections to Stevenson allows that only 'direct sources' can be advanced as evidence of 'significant influence'. Circumscribing the rules of engagement thus, Watt uses a critical vocabulary that is not particularly helpful to a reader seeking to establish links of a structural and thematic nature. For example, in a passage from his discussions of possible influences, Watt argues that Conrad is engaged upon a different project from Stevenson. This thesis will propose that in 'The Beach of Falesá' and *The Ebb Tide*, Stevenson is covering issues exactly similar to those addressed by Conrad in the focal texts under consideration in this study. Watt's argument is important because it is indicative of a critical methodology itself predicated upon the assumption that Conrad's early fiction is not in any real sense derivative:

The English works which have been most plausibly suggested as possible direct sources for Conrad stories are by Kipling and Stevenson. But the undeniable similarities of plot both between Kipling's "The Man Who Would Be King" (1888) and Conrad's "An Outpost of Progress," and

between Stevenson's "The Beach of Falesá" (1893, in *The Island Night's Entertainments*) (sic) and *Heart of Darkness*, are hardly close enough to be *convincing evidence of significant influence; and there is no reason to suppose that Conrad was particularly indebted to either Stevenson or Kipling beyond their part in creating an audience for exotic narrative.* [CNC, 43] (my italics)

In the foregoing extract, Watt appears to be reluctant to acknowledge the existence of anything other than a superficial resemblance between the South Seas fiction of Stevenson and Conrad's own early output. Furthermore, subject to an apparent myopia, Watt at once hints at textual similarities, without ever conceding that Conrad was 'influenced' when he states:

In a sense, Conrad is the least derivative of writers; he wrote very little that could possibly be mistaken for the work of anyone else; and he consciously avoided following the doctrines of any particular literary school. But he did read very widely; and as is usual in an author's first significant work, the main residues of his reading are more clearly present in *Almayer's Folly* than elsewhere. [CNC, 42]

It is central to this chapter, and indeed to this thesis, that an exploration of Conrad's early fiction may illustrate common concerns with that of Stevenson's later work, and that it is possible to show evidence of linkages which seem to call into question elements of Watt's argument. This exploration is concerned less with matters of derivation than with seeking to establish commonality of purpose. It may also be stated that Watt makes no mention of *The Ebb Tide*, a text which lies at the core of the present thesis precisely because it locates Stevenson alongside Conrad on Jameson's fault line, but also because of its overtly critical stance in regard to European expansionism.

In order to establish some thematic connections between Stevenson and Conrad, analysis of *Almayer's Folly*, *An Outcast of the Islands* and 'Karain' (1898) will be undertaken. It will be posited that in these early

texts, Conrad is formulating a view of imperialism based upon his own experience in much the same manner as Stevenson had done in ‘The Beach of Falesá’ and *The Ebb Tide*.

It is important to stress, even at this early stage, that this argument is not based upon the assumption that in the early works Conrad had read Stevenson and later adapted material for use in his own novels. The extent to which Conrad’s *Victory* mirrors aspects of *The Ebb Tide* is the focal argument in the concluding chapter of the present thesis. However, that argument seeks to examine several points of contact between the two writers in order to propose the view that Conrad is working on a line of investigation very similar to that followed by Stevenson.

Almayer’s Folly, in common with ‘The Beach of Falesá’, foregrounds a trader eager to return to Europe in order to enjoy material wealth: thus, Almayer and Wiltshire share a common heritage. Like Wiltshire, an archetypal company man as opposed to a self-motivated entrepreneur, Almayer is dependent upon Tom Lingard for his living. Evidencing a similar sense of predicament to that faced by Wiltshire at the conclusion of ‘The Beach of Falesá’, Almayer seeks to leave Sambir, and with it his Malay wife, and return to Europe. Both Almayer and Wiltshire appear to share a distinctly modern sense of dislocation and uncertainty and their predicaments seem to interrogate and challenge some of the assumptions under-pinning European confidence in the imperialist project. Almayer is, arguably, more inclined to fantasise than John Wiltshire: the latter accepts that his ‘half-caste’ children prevent a return to rural English life and the life of pub landlord he had envisaged for himself. Almayer, on the

contrary, has self-deluding episodes during which he imagines returning to Europe with riches and his privately educated daughter in tow.

Like Wiltshire, Almayer's interest in his exotic location seldom extends beyond the concerns of a trader and representative of European culture. Both men can be viewed as subscribing to a mind-set existing only to exploit the respective local populations. Conrad, like Stevenson, marries his central character to a local native woman. Unlike Uma and Wiltshire, Almayer and his wife do not enjoy a loving relationship although Almayer does father a half-caste child. Conrad, against a different backdrop, addresses the same Victorian anxiety regarding miscegenation as Stevenson tackles in 'The Beach of Falesá'.

Almayer's Folly opens with the anti-hero viewing the world, in many respects *his* world, from the stoop of his lavish house. The house has been built as a testimony to his success, but it is already demonstrating signs of disrepair: it will come to stand as a metaphor for the futility and frustration of Almayer's ambition.

Conrad shares the assumptions of other nineteenth-century writers, including Stevenson, where his writing reveals, perhaps in spite of himself, the ease with which the ideological assumption of the legitimacy of foreign power is contained in fiction of the period. The racial absolute is white and European and the hegemony of whites over native populations is axiomatic. Like Wiltshire, Almayer has embarked upon an anabasis in search of riches and has been 'beached' in a similar way: both men have difficulties to face up to because of their relationships with native women. The primary difference between them is that whereas

Wiltshire is ruminatively optimistic about the future, Almayer is, even at the outset, propelled towards a decline that presages an inevitability about the outcome wholly unlike anything in Wiltshire's experience. In 'The Beach of Falesá', Stevenson anticipates the existentialist *angst* he would employ to climactic effect in *The Ebb Tide*, and Conrad's debut novel describes a similar preparatory phase for later works such as *Heart of Darkness* and *Victory*.

Sambir, the fictional setting for *Almayer's Folly*, is a powerful metaphor for the competitive world of foreign influences, as in Falesá. The region is subject to conflicting commercial interests, the most powerful of which is that run by Tom Lingard, 'Rajah Laut', King of the Sea. The optimistic Lingard has an outlook in common with Wiltshire in his desire to bring about the best. However, at the beginning of *Almayer's Folly*, Sambir is torn apart by rival economic interests represented by different ethnic groups. Racial mixing is a central theme and occupies Almayer as he reflects on the verandah in the opening scene:

He liked to look at it about the time of sunset; perhaps because at that time the sinking sun would spread a glowing gold tinge on the waters of the Pantai, and Almayer's thoughts were often busy with gold; gold he had failed to secure; gold the others had secured - dishonestly of course - or gold he meant to secure yet, through his own honest exertions - for himself and Nina. He absorbed himself in his dream of wealth and power away from this coast where he had dwelt for so many years; forgetting the bitterness of toil and strife in the vision of a great and splendid reward. They would live in Europe, he and his daughter. They would be rich and respected. Nobody would think of her mixed blood in the presence of her great beauty and of his immense wealth. Witnessing her triumphs he would grow young again - he would forget the twenty five years of heart breaking struggle on this coast where he felt like a prisoner. All this was nearly within his reach.³

Almayer's preoccupations are linked to schemes altogether grander than those conceived by Wiltshire, who desires only to see his half-caste

girls happily married. Wiltshire, however, concedes the difficulties involved in achieving even that modest goal. Almayer dreams of spectacular riches based on the acquisition of gold, possession of which will override any prejudice against his mixed race daughter. In his world within a world, Almayer is isolated from reality and the shifting power bases around him render his dreams futile, and the image of the rotting ‘Folly’ as an emblem of his final great miscalculation is potent.

In his ‘Author’s Note’ to the text, Conrad reveals several of the central concerns that occupy him in *Almayer’s Folly* and *An Outcast of the Islands*. Significantly, they are also the themes that lie at the core of ‘An Outpost of Progress’ and *Heart of Darkness*: they are the themes that similarly occupied Stevenson in his Pacific fiction:

The critic and the judge seems to think that in those distant lands all joy is a yell and a war dance, all pathos is a howl and a ghastly grin of filed teeth, and that the solution of all problems is found in the barrel of a revolver or on the point of an assegai. [AF, 3]

In this extract, Conrad reveals something of his empathy with the nations of empire and in doing so, he mirrors many of the attitudes explored by Stevenson in *A Footnote to History*. He demonstrates an outsider’s ironic awareness of the prevailing Victorian attitudes not only towards the literature that dealt with the subject of imperialism, but also towards the imperial subject him- and herself. In postulating an alternative, and critical response, Conrad connects with many of the themes in Stevenson’s later fiction.

Almayer’s Folly resonates with many of the tropes of adventure fiction used by Stevenson: pirates, secret channels, political scheming and a

central character threatened simultaneously on several fronts conjures an image of Jim Hawkins in *Treasure Island*. It is significant that Conrad should adopt the genre of adventure-romance to frame his attack on the arrogance of interlopers, of whatever racial background. These types impose their own cultural values on an alien Other and they are inherently racist, in keeping with the broader outlook of the period.

In associating the heroic with Dain, Conrad subverts the occidental power structure in Sambir and portrays it as corrupt and malevolent. Sharing Stevenson's awareness of the universality of human nature demonstrated in the episode in which Uma needs to be rid of the taboo, Conrad problematises the relationship between locals and Europeans by highlighting the internecine strife between local interests. Rapacious local traders, in their rush to exploit Sambir, threaten Dain's safety. He is at one time or another in danger from the Arabs and the Malayan chief, Lakamba. However, Almayer is cast as the novel's anti-hero, consumed by one de-stabilising and persistent obsession: to amass great riches and return to the 'mother country'. He has none of the commitment to Sambir that Wiltshire demonstrates in his adoption of a South Seas island as his home. Almayer's self-confessed role is to exploit and then leave. In this sense, Almayer is arguably more representative of the prevailing values of his time and consequently less radical than Wiltshire. He is unable to see beyond the imperialist's assumptions of racial superiority: he wishes to have no more of Sambir or its inhabitants. In a less conventional manner, Wiltshire denies his past in a marriage that challenges Victorian social mores. It is not merely that Wiltshire enters into a marriage with a woman

of non-European origin, he does so, eventually, in a spirit different to that of Almayer.

Almayer's marriage is a sham, a metaphor for the dishonesty perpetrated in the name of something more honourable that was to characterize much of the European involvement in the Far East. Conrad's anti-hero is a more conventional creation than Stevenson's figure: he is not such an ambivalent figure, for example. There are, however, relational links to Wiltshire and they further establish the commonality of purpose evidenced in the works under consideration. At the conclusion of 'The Beach of Falesá', Wiltshire finds a fresh voice: he is virtually reconciled to his lot. Stevenson has detached Wiltshire from his past and set him upon a new road. Almayer too, is capable of finding an alternative voice, but as Orr illustrates in his discussion of *Almayer's Folly*, it is a voice that reveals the nature of Almayer's malaise:

Emotionally, Almayer seems to move between an impenetrable lassitude, a torpor that makes him nearly catatonic, that is a way to avoid thinking about all the frustrations and deadends he has had, and a bitter anger. Almayer is certain that no one has experienced undeserved suffering as he has. [Orr, 30]

Orr accurately identifies Almayer's tendency to swing between unwarranted self-belief and equally unrealistic visions of doom. One constant, however, is the characteristic racism evidenced in Almayer's interactions with the Malays and Arabs with whom he is engaged in trade. While Stevenson seems to offer the possibility of redemptive and reconciliatory dialogue through love at the conclusion of 'The Beach of Falesá', neither Almayer nor his wife can countenance life with the other. Both share the same fantasies: acquisition of great riches and influence

unburdened by the presence of the husband or wife. This, of course, makes Conrad's text different, but not necessarily inferior.

Conrad succeeds in portraying the sense of Almayer as outsider when he allows Almayer to acquire a different 'voice'. In the episode when Almayer discloses the headless corpse to the Dutch naval authorities, at the moment when he believes he has lost everything, Almayer evidences an uncanny detachment:

Almayer shivered as he made an effort to speak, and again, with an uncertain gesture he seemed to free his throat from the grip of an invisible hand. His bloodshot eyes wandered aimlessly from face to face.

"There!" he said at last. - "Are you all there? He is a dangerous man."

He dragged at the cover with hasty violence and the body rolled stiffly off the planks and fell at his feet in rigid helplessness. -

"Cold, perfectly cold," said Almayer looking round with a mirthless smile.

"Sorry can do no better. And you can't hang him either. As you observe gentlemen" - he added gravely - "there is no head and hardly any neck."

[AF, 108]

Conrad achieves a sense of dislocation in the foregoing extract indicative of the voicing in the realistic musing in the final paragraphs of 'The Beach of Falesá'. Just as nothing has prepared the reader for Wiltshire's response to his fate, so nothing prepares the reader for Almayer's acquisition of his new found laconic detachment. Conrad uses this alternative, and hitherto unheard voicing to distance himself from Almayer but, ironically, Almayer speaks with a voice similar to that of Conrad. He becomes the sceptical, even caustic commentator, assuming a role closer to that of the externalised author.

It seems that whereas Wiltshire has found his paradise, however compromised he may feel in relation to the discovery, Almayer has found something altogether different. While both are alike in their sense of

disillusionment, Wiltshire has adopted a positive outlook and Almayer a negative response to his circumstances.

Almayer's Folly is set in a location already tainted, having been subjected to external commercial interests, firstly in the form of Tom Lingard's trading company, and subsequently by Arab traders and the Dutch. As does Falesá, the region functions as framework within which conflicting racial, religious and commercial ideologies conflate in a destabilising compound. Conrad presents the topography of Sambir in a manner that gives the reader the essential elements of a place very different to conventional images of the exotic east. The reader *senses* the oppressiveness of the physical environment and associates it with the pressures on Almayer to realise his dream. Like Almayer, the reader wishes to distance himself from the stultifying atmosphere and so, by use of this powerful metaphorical device, Conrad conveys the extent of Almayer's malaise: itself a metaphor, perhaps, for the Imperial malaise. Conrad associates the physical nature of locations with metaphorical equivalences in subsequent texts, most powerfully and memorably in *Heart of Darkness*. Stevenson was to create a physical location in *The Ebb Tide*, using a parallel multi-layered device, to even greater effect. These resemblances will be the subject of further investigation later in this study.

Conrad, having had personal and direct experience of the economic power struggle in the East, connects with several thematic strands very much to the fore in the minds of late-nineteenth-century Britons. Stevenson, travelling extensively in the South Pacific, is equally well-

positioned to incorporate his experiences of economic and political competition into the fabric of his later fiction.

The on-going anxieties inspired by Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859), and the under-pinning racist interpretations of natural selection and racial absolutes help to construct a world view predicated upon competition for individual survival against the backdrop of a capitalist struggle for world domination⁴. The emergent nations, Germany and the United States in particular, were mounting a challenge to British imperial ambitions by the early 1890s⁵. The concomitant anxiety associated with dissipating world influence experienced in British society circles found itself re-figured in the fiction of the day. *Almayer's Folly* is a novel that demonstrates the focalization of the contemporary gaze on competition and survival.

The structure of the novel is a departure from the linear narrative of nineteenth century 'adventure' fiction beginning, as it does, *in media res* and moving backwards and forwards in time and location. The spatio-temporal arrangement of *Almayer's Folly* is similar to that of 'The Beach of Falesá' and an identifiable proto-modernist trope, experimentation with a non-linear narrative structure, may be discerned in both novels. A critical survey of the structure shows how Conrad, chapter by chapter, develops *Almayer's Folly* as a novel of predicament.

The antipathy between Almayer and his wife is developed into a metaphor for the inter-racial mixing so abhorrent to a section of Victorian public opinion. Patrick Brantlinger, in his essay 'Race and the Victorian Novel', makes the following comment on the prevailing attitudes of the period:

To use a nineteenth-century term that was simultaneously cultural and biological (and, hence, racial), Thackeray believed that blacks like Sambo and mixed race people like both Miss Swartz and Captain Woolcomb lacked genuine 'breeding,' which money could not buy. Moreover, a widely accepted fallacy, at least before Darwin, was that racial hybrids such as mulattoes were or would become infertile, unable to reproduce. This fallacy implied also that mixed-race people were somehow even more inferior than racially 'pure' people of any race. Racism in all its forms depends upon a fantasy of a pure origin, when a race was untainted by inferior 'breeds' or 'bloods'⁶

It can be seen from this extract that Conrad, in tackling the difficult question of miscegenation, was addressing a centrally important topic. Thackeray, of course, predates the proto-Modernist divide by a substantial period, but it seems likely that some of the attitudes that prevailed in his time survived into the late-Victorian period. It may be that in these proto-Modernist texts, both Stevenson and Conrad challenge some of the assumptions associated with Thackeray while remaining influenced by them, in a complex relational sense. Like Stevenson, Conrad was emphasising the difficulties associated with intermarriage and the cultural and racial ambivalence likely to confront the progeny of an inter-racially mixed union. Leonard Orr develops a parallel argument in respect of *Almayer's Folly*:

The girl was brought back by Lingard from a pirating trip and placed in a convent to receive a Western-style education. But it is often the case in Conrad's fiction that these late attempts to westernize the native fail (like the fireman who assists Marlow in running the engine of the boat in *Heart of Darkness*). No longer one of the natives, never to be one of the colonizers, the character stands for a failed experiment of assimilation of cultures.

[Orr, 31]

Conrad's portrayal of Almayer's wife as a woman fiercely loyal to her origins and traditions is significant. She rejects Almayer and by so doing rejects European influence, preferring instead the lifestyle of a Malay. Her ability to exert influence over their daughter is a source of anxiety to Almayer, although he believes that he can gain his daughter's confidence

as a result of riches. It is a measure of Almayer's delusional state that he fails to see the reality of his predicament: Nina is in love with Dain Maroola and Almayer is powerless to influence that situation. Almayer needs Dain in order to secure the very wealth with which he seeks to secure his daughter's loyalty.

It is Almayer's ambition to 'return' to Europe with Nina and with Lingard's fortune, the latter having been recovered by Dain. In this ambition, as in others, Almayer is ultimately frustrated: his desires come to nothing. Mrs. Almayer is determined that her daughter will not follow the lifestyle she has endured and the opposition of European and Malay values is foregrounded in *Almayer's Folly* as a central theme. Orr considers Conrad's characterization of Mrs. Almayer to be both insightful and subversive of European attitudes towards the colonial Other:

Mrs. Almayer is the architect behind the fatal relationship of Nina and Dain Maroola. Her stories (strengthened by the negative example of Almayer) have persuaded Nina to reject any possible British and Dutch suitors. Nina 'listened with avidity to the old woman's tales of the departed glories of the Rajahs,...and she became gradually more indifferent, more contemptuous of the white side of her descent represented by a feeble and traditionless father' (AF, 43). She gives her daughter blood-thirsty advice about how to be the wife of the ideal Malay warrior-prince (AF, 152-53). When Nina meets secretly with Dain, her 'fingers played with his hair in an absent-minded caress as she stood absorbed in thought. The thing was done. Her mother was right. The man was her slave' (AF, 172). [Orr, 33]

Orr demonstrates the extent to which Conrad's use of irony in *Almayer's Folly* is based upon Almayer's obsession with riches and escape to Europe. Almayer has evidently never guessed at the innermost desires harboured by his daughter, his distance from her mirroring the distance he has travelled, in an emotional sense, from her mother. The increasing isolation of Almayer can be charted from this point, as can

Nina's rejection of her father's ambitions in favour of commitment to Dain and a life in the East.

In both *Almayer's Folly* and *An Outcast of the Islands*, Conrad equates women, that is to say indigenous women who form relationships with white men, with the colonial territory. They must fight to retain their native values if they are to avoid relegation to the subordinate roles to which their men would reduce them. There is a significant distancing between the competences the women display and the roles to which whites would have them assigned. Conrad, in common with Stevenson, views these women as bearers of tradition and particularly of the values which characterize their respective cultures. The women are representative of tradition and act as a bulwark against the diluting force of a hostile, outsider culture. Neither Stevenson nor Conrad is overtly sexist, nor are they in some sense incompetent in portraying female characters, but rather both are creating characters in the likeness of the emerging 'New Woman' of late-Victorian Britain. One characteristic of the 'New Woman' was her competence, and that linked to her capacity to function alongside men without being necessarily subordinated to them, presented a challenge to the Victorian social order. However, the example of Mina Harker in *Dracula* (1897) is perhaps worthy of mention in this respect. She is acceptable to the 'Crew of Light' because she has the mind of a man, but also because she 'is more clearly on the side of the paternal law', according to Elizabeth Bronfen⁷. The possibility exists that in representing women in this radical manner, Conrad portrays them as a metaphor for the stabilising, and resistant elements existing in a culture

experiencing subjection to colonisation, and as Mina resists Dracula, so these Conradian figures resist the foreign coloniser.

It is clear that a sense of mutual recrimination founded along racial lines exists between Almayer and his wife. It may well be that the genesis of this bitterness is connected to the means by which the girl came to be Lingard's ward:

When in compliance with Lingard's abrupt demand, Almayer consented to wed the Malay girl, no one knew that on the day when the interesting young convert had lost all her natural relations and found a white father, she had been fighting desperately like the rest of them on board the prau, and was only prevented from leaping overboard like the few other survivors by a severe wound in the leg. - There on the fore-deck of the prau, old Lingard found her under a heap of dead and dying pirates, and had her carried on the poop of the 'Flash' before the Malay craft was set on fire and sent adrift. She was conscious, and in the great peace and stillness of the tropical evening succeeding the turmoil of the battle, she watched all she held dear on earth after her own savage manner, drift away into the gloom in a great roar of flame and smoke. She lay there unheeding the careful hands attending to her wound, silent and absorbed in gazing at the funeral pile of those brave men she had so much admired and so well helped in their contest with the redoubtable 'Rajah Laut'. [AF, 18]

The girl is captured, having fought as bravely as the Malay men aboard the native craft and the metaphorical equation of the woman and the colonial territory is established. At her best, she can fight to maintain a sense of self and a sense of her culture. She is also prescient enough to understand that in order to maintain the hegemonic balance between her own and the colonising culture a compromise will be necessary:

She realised that with this vanishing gleam her old life departed too. Thenceforth there was slavery in the far countries, amongst strangers; in unknown and perhaps terrible surroundings. Being fourteen years old she realised her position and came to that conclusion, the only one possible to a Malay girl, soon ripened under a tropical sun, and not unaware of her personal charms, of which she heard many a young brave warrior of her father's crew express an appreciative admiration. [AF, 18]

However, marriage to Almayer re-establishes Mrs. Almayer as a powerful woman. Not, ironically, because he provides her with anything

she may have lacked in a material sense, but because she retains the fighting prowess and the determination of her cultural antecedents.

Conrad emphasises the potency of the threat she poses to the feeble

Almayer, woman or not:

There was in her the dread of the unknown; otherwise she accepted her position calmly, after the manner of her people, and even considered it quite natural; for, was she not the daughter of warriors, conquered in battle, and did she not belong rightfully to the victorious Rajah? Even the evident kindness of the terrible old man must spring, she thought, from admiration for his captive; and the flattered vanity eased for her the pangs of sorrow after such an awful calamity. Perhaps had she known of the high walls, the quiet gardens and the silent nuns of the Samarang convent, where her destiny was leading her she would have sought death in her dread and hate of such a restraint. But in imagination she pictured to herself the usual life of a Malay girl; - the usual succession of heavy work and fierce love, of intrigues; gold ornaments - of domestic drudgery and of that great but occult influence which is one of the few rights of half savage womankind. But her destiny in the rough hands of the old sea-dog acting under unreasoning impulses of the heart, took a strange and to her a terrible shape. She bore it all; the restraint and the teaching and the new faith - with calm submission, concealing her hate and contempt for all that new life. - She learned the language very easily, yet understood but little of the new faith the good sisters taught her, assimilating quickly only the superstitious elements of the religion. She called Lingard father, gently and caressingly, at each of his short and noisy visits - under the clear impression that he was a great and dangerous power it was good to propitiate. Was he not now her master? And during those long four years she nourished a hope of finding favour in his eyes and ultimately becoming his wife, counsellor and guide. - [AF, 18-19]

Conrad does not ascribe an inferior status to the Malay girl, and she is not assumed to perform a subservient role in her newly re-oriented life. This is a point worthy of mention especially, perhaps, in light of widespread criticism of Conrad as a writer who allegedly espouses both sexist and racist attitudes. That is not to argue that attitudes towards indigenous populations were not affected by a belief system built securely on the foundation of a Victorian racial absolute which was male, English-speaking and which demanded membership of the professional middle-class. Conrad's relationship to that racial absolute was complicated by his

origins in a culture standing outside the centre of colonial Britain. The resulting relationship informs a willingness to acknowledge worth and validity in cultures other than his own: a willingness, perhaps, generally lacking in the mindset of late-Victorian England. It is evident in the South Seas novels of Stevenson and in the Malay novels of Conrad, that both authors were of the opinion that people were, by and large, the same wherever one may find them. Admittedly, this is not a particularly exciting revelation to modern readers of nineteenth-century fiction but it is a radical enough concept in its time, and especially so when set against the prevailing attitudes towards women and to indigenous populations of 'foreign' countries. It may also represent an attitudinal shift away from the Empire embracing of the eighteenth century, such as Colley identifies for example, in respect of Scotland and British colonial ambition. In his South Seas fiction, Stevenson like Conrad, is moving away from the Victorian consensus in the direction of a more critical response to Imperialism.

The Almayers have a daughter, Nina, who is eventually sent by Almayer to be schooled in a 'white' establishment in Singapore and her unexpected return after ten years there, brings Almayer a measure of prestige. However, Nina is reticent about her life in Singapore and, upon her return, it becomes clear that she has developed a far closer affinity with her Malay mother than with her white father:

Almayer vainly expected to hear of the cause of his daughter's return from his daughter's lips. Not that day, nor on any other day did she ever allude to her Singapore life. He did not care to ask, awed by the calm impassiveness of her face, by those solemn eyes looking past him on the great, still forests sleeping in majestic repose to the murmur of the broad river. He accepted the situation, happy in the gentle and protecting affection the girl showed him, fitfully enough, for she had - as he called it - her bad days when she used to visit her mother and remain long hours in the riverside hut, coming out as inscrutable as ever but with a contemptuous look and a short word ready to

answer any of his speeches. - He got used even to that and on those days, kept quiet, although greatly alarmed by his wife's influence upon the girl.

[AF, 25]

The competing cultures of Almayer and his wife occlude in the person of Nina: in her is evidenced the social construct of western culture as represented by her English-style education, but her mother's culture is also present in her in terms of temperament and outlook. Nina is referred to as '*Mem Putih*' [26], literally meaning 'white lady': the polite form of address in Sambir indicates a deeper significance. In the Dutch colony from 1856 onwards, the Eurasian population was classed as white, and previously existing legal distinctions were annulled⁸. Conrad overlooks this fact in order to examine those unofficial attitudes towards the Eurasian population which were to continue after the legal process had been completed.

Almayer, encouraged and optimistic because of the foundation of the British North Borneo Company, builds his 'new' home but his optimism is short-lived. A series of border disputes between the British and Dutch results in the province of Sambir being administered by the Dutch. The rival colonial interests become locked in conflict and attempts at a resolution of the difficulties are initiated. There are direct parallels with the relationship of Wiltshire and Case in '*The Beach of Falesá*'. Significantly, the discussions take place away from Sambir:

The deliberations conducted in London have a far-reaching importance; and so, the decision issued from the fog-veiled offices of the Borneo Company darkened for Almayer the brilliant sunshine of the Tropics and added another drop of bitterness to the cup of his disenchantments. The claim to that part of the East coast was abandoned leaving the Pantai river under the nominal power of Holland. In Sambir there was joy and excitement. The slaves were hurried out of sight into the forest and jungle, and the flags were run up to tall poles in the Rajah's compound in expectation of a visit from Dutch man-of-wars boats. [AF, 28]

Conrad introduces the Dutch colonists and undermines Almayer's plans to benefit from leasing his new house to engineers from the British North Borneo Company. To add to his difficulties, Almayer's wife undertakes to work for Lakamba against her husband: Almayer's sense of dislocation from his family is furthered by Nina's rejection of her 'white' education and her close association with her Malay heritage as related to her by her embittered mother:

And listening to the recital of those savage glories, those barbarous fights and savage feasting, to the story of deeds valorous, albeit somewhat bloodthirsty, where men of her mother's race shone far above the Orang Blanda⁹ she felt herself irresistibly fascinated and saw with vague surprise the narrow mantle of civilised morality in which good-meaning people had wrapped her young soul, fall away and leave her shivering and helpless as if on the edge of some deep and unknown abyss. Strangest of all, this abyss did not frighten her when she was under the influence of the witch-like being she called her mother -- with a certain sense of surprise that it should be so. She seemed to have forgotten in civilised surroundings her life before the time when Lingard had - so to speak - kidnapped her from Sambir. Since then she had had Christian teaching, social education and a good glimpse of the civilised life. Unfortunately her teachers did not understand her nature, and the education ended in a scene of humiliation, in an outburst of contempt from white people for her mixed blood. [AF, 33-34]

Almayer's intentions are again ironically subverted, his insistence on western, Anglicised education has resulted in his daughter's rejection of the colonial value-system and has had the opposite effect from that which he intended. It is as if Conrad constructs a series of ironic reversals in order to examine Almayer's motives, and by extension, the motives of the self-appointed agents of improvement, be they Dutch or British. At any rate, Nina undergoes a process in which she grows to prefer the straightforwardness of the Malays:

To her resolute nature, however, after all these years, the savage and uncompromising sincerity of purpose shown by her Malay kinsmen seemed at last preferable to the sleek hypocrisy, to the polite disguises, to the virtuous pretences of such white people as she had the misfortune to come in contact

with. After all it was her life; it was going to be her life - and so thinking she fell more and more under the influence of her mother. [AF, 35]

The process outlined here is gradual but the extent to which it renders Almayer's world irrelevant to Nina's plans is a further, and powerfully ironic, subversion of her father's dream. Almayer's vision of paradise is blighted by a confluence of motives which so blur his judgement that his isolation and decline become inevitable.

To suggest that *Almayer's Folly* is only concerned with conflicts of a racial nature would be erroneous and overly-simplistic, however. It is a text that addresses several dominant issues such as degeneration and regression and, therefore, fits into a body of work that has characteristics which connect to the thematics of proto-modernist writing as established in the introductory chapter of the present thesis. The alienation and isolation of Almayer is set in sharper focus than that of Wiltshire who, apparently resigned to his predicament, is still pre-occupied with concerns about his half-caste children. However, both Almayer and Wiltshire are disassociated from the mainstream activities of their peers who are engaged in the business of expanding empires. In a sense, both men are emasculated by circumstances beyond their control and the nature of their respective predicaments hints at the absurd and meaningless lives of characters in a Beckett drama or, perhaps even more darkly, the bewildered figures of Kafka's fiction. Almayer, moreover, is captured in a dream-world within which his imagination is romantically tied to a European idyll which reverses the norm of conventional romance in which Europe looks to the East for tranquil havens of escape; here, Almayer wishes to escape to the Netherlands. Furthermore, Almayer is caught up in

the rivalry of competing European powers and the resulting intrusion into his commercial interests limits his effectiveness and exacerbates his feeling of impotency.

Narrative shifts underpin events in the near past and deal primarily with the meeting of Dain and the Almayers. Dain's status as a Balinese prince is important and enables him to develop a partnership with Almayer and Lakamba which is multi-racial and mirrors the competing economic designs of western countries in the Archipelago. This section of the novel is important in that it seeks to show global political ambition replicated in microcosmic scale. The world of machination and intrigue that is Sambir is an effective metaphor for the decaying, but still destructive influence of colonial power-broking. The combination of British, Dutch and Arab greed, and the individual drive of each group for economic supremacy, pulls apart Almayer's relatively fragile world and condemns him to an existence of abject futility. In the concluding section of Chapter Five, as Nina begins to fall in love with Dain Maroola, Almayer looks forward to an expedition to retrieve Lingard's gold, deposited by the '*Rajah Laut*' in the interior during the heyday of his omnipotence. Acquisition of the gold will mean that Almayer's dream of riches and status in Europe can be realised. However, Almayer's position is compromised: he can only finance the expedition to the interior by providing Dain with gunpowder for use in the on-going Malayan wars, and given that this is the only way that Almayer can secure Dain's commitment to the project, he is compelled to agree. Almayer's expectation is that Dain Maroola will honour his part of the bargain and

will return from his adventure to assist Almayer in his search for Lingard's gold. In the end, Dain runs off with his daughter, provoking the thought that Conrad's title, *Almayer's Folly*, is not singularly connected to Almayer having built an improbably lavish house. The novel's title may also refer to Almayer's susceptibility to be taken in by wilier operators, whose awareness of the contingent *realpolitik* is more fully developed than his own: in another reversal of norms, Almayer is out-manoeuvred by the alien Other. That Almayer is taken in is no surprise because the structure of the text creates a reflection of the confusion in relation to the political machinations that go on between the different interests. It is by no means clear at the outset what the outcome will be as Conrad explores each of Almayer's individual interests and obsessions. The reader can relate to Almayer's predicament as the narrative explores the unstable alliances between the respective parties. There is no evidence of a clearly expository approach to the narrative, and its meandering and on occasion obfuscatory progress, further heightens the awareness that Conrad has departed from the conventional techniques of earlier Victorian authors. This is especially noticeable in his refusal to lay a summary of the action before the reader. Such a departure is significant not only in terms of *Almayer's Folly* as a debut novel but also as a waymark for Conrad's subsequent fiction. There are resemblances in *Heart of Darkness*, for example, which will merit analysis later in this thesis. One such example. authorial denial of a clear route through the text is problematic: the obscuring of hermeneutic pathways in *Almayer's Folly* is a significant part of a process that transforms adventure fiction into something more akin to

the modern psychological novel. Examination of the thematic structure of the novel reveals Conrad's abiding interest in the ability to see clearly and to navigate through life. *Almayer's Folly* foregrounds a character deficient in Conrad's terms because he fails to make realistic judgements and so is condemned to live a marginal existence.

In his essay 'A Man of the Last Hour' Chris Bongie examines the core issue of difference in *Almayer's Folly* in relation to the aforementioned ability to perceive events accurately. He emphasises the conflict arising from the opposition of the exotic and the mundane and locates the alternative outlooks of Dain and Almayer within their respective cultural frames of reference:

The difference that separates the world of the Malay from that of the European becomes especially clear if we consider one of the novel's central thematic motifs: vision. In *Almayer's Folly* Conrad opposes Dain's way of seeing to Almayer's in a manner that might well be characterized as Wordsworthian. In Book 'Twelve of *The Prelude*, Wordsworth speaks of a time when he was under the 'absolute dominion' of 'the bodily eye in every stage of life / The most despotic of our senses'¹⁰ It is this 'despotism' that characterizes Dain's exotic world: concerning his initial encounter with Nina we are told, for instance, that 'from the very first moment when his eyes beheld this - to him - perfection of loveliness he felt in his inmost heart the conviction that she would be his; he felt the subtle breath of mutual understanding passing between their two savage natures' (p.63). Almayer's vision, on the other hand, is a badly flawed version of what Wordsworth (in 'I wandered Lonely as a Cloud,' among other places) called the 'inward eye' - that internalized vision by which the Wordsworthian subject is rescued from and redeems the power of the first, despotic eye. Rather than enlightening the exotic dream of the senses, however, Almayer merely projects it upon it his own murky desire for material possessions.¹¹

Following on from Dain's escape into the interior on the river swollen by the monsoon, a headless body is recovered from the river and discovered to be wearing Dain's jewellery. Almayer's shock when he hears the news of Dain's supposed death reduces him to despair: the extended theme of frustrated dreams and the futility of hope re-emerges:

A dead Malay: he had seen many dead Malays without any emotion; and now he felt inclined to weep, but it was over the fate of a white man he knew; a man that fell over a deep precipice and did not die. He seemed somehow to himself to be standing on one side, a little way off, looking at a certain Almayer who was in great trouble. Poor, poor fellow. Why doesn't he cut his throat? He wished to encourage him; he was very anxious to see him lying dead over that other corpse. Why does he not die and end this suffering? - He groaned aloud unconsciously and started with affright at the sound of his own voice. Was he going mad? Terrified by the thought he turned away and ran towards his house repeating to himself: - I am not going mad; - of course not, no, no, no! He tried to keep a firm hold of the idea. Not mad, not mad. He stumbled as he ran blindly up the steps repeating fast and ever faster those words wherein seemed to lie his salvation. He saw Nina standing there and wished to say something to her but could not remember what in his extreme anxiety not to forget that he was not going mad which he still kept repeating mentally as he ran round the table, till he stumbled against one of the arm chairs and dropped into it exhausted.

[AF, 76]

Almayer's response to the discovery of the body is hardly surprising: his lack of clear-sightedness makes it improbable that he will draw the correct conclusions from the available evidence. He is once again out-thought by wiler opponents. Almayer's impaired vision, in the metaphorical sense at least, casts him in the role of the blind, dislocated European struggling to come to terms with a strange culture and obsessed by an impossible dream. Almayer's response to Dain's 'death' is revealing:

"And so Dain is dead" - she [Nina] said coldly when her father ceased speaking. -

Almayer's elaborately calm demeanour gave way in a moment to an outburst of violent indignation. -

"You stand there as if you were only half alive and talk to me" - he exclaimed angrily - "as if it was a matter of no importance. Yes! He is dead! Do you understand! Dead! What do you care? You never cared; you saw me struggle, and work and strive unmoved; and my suffering you never could see. No! Never! - You have no heart, and you have no mind too or you would have understood that it was for you, for your happiness I was working. I wanted to be rich; I wanted to get away from here. I wanted to see white men bowing low before the power of your beauty and your wealth. Old as I am I wished to seek a strange land, a civilization to which I am a stranger so as to find a new life in the contemplation of your high fortunes, of your triumphs, of your happiness. For that I bore patiently the burden of work, of disappointment, of humiliation amongst these savages here - and I had it all nearly in my grasp." [AF, 77]

Almayer is overwhelmed by events he *believes* to have taken place and, despite his undistinguished past, he is unable to reconcile his evaporating dreams with his carefully nurtured vision of riches. He reacts as if the success of his plan was assured and the apparent failure of Dain's expedition, and the implications for Almayer, reduce him to an almost catatonic state. Within the foregoing passages, there is a sense in which Almayer resembles Wiltshire although Stevenson's treatment is less dramatic and, arguably, more subtle. However, the same impression of incomprehension, of a lingering sense of bewilderment at the vicissitudes of life, leave both characters pondering the distance between ambition and achievement. In Almayer's case there is a more explicit emphasis on personal greed and its importance as a central thematic element within the novel cannot be lost on the reader. Conrad seeks to highlight the mercenary aspects of Almayer's character and to offer it as a vision of that element in human nature that transcends class, or indeed, culture and race. The apprehension of the diminishing Almayer functioning as a metaphor for the dying century is difficult to resist. Equally, he may be read as a figurative representation of the decline of the Imperial colonist. Whatever, Almayer is a defeated and spent force. The vital, energetic life-force is represented by Dain and Nina, but Conrad seems to suggest that before the new can flourish, the old must first be cleared away. In the context of the 1890s, this amounts to a major shift in attitudes. Imperialism was founded on several assumptions of dubious provenance, but the historian Lawrence James provides an insight into the mindset of the Victorian

writer on Empire Sir John Seeley¹² and so points up the beliefs of the period:

The British empire was an expression of what Seeley considered to be the special genius of the Anglo-Saxon race, that is the British. Social Darwinism was now fashionable and its theories, a rough and ready transfer of Darwin's principles from the world of plants and animals to that of men, suggested that certain races were better fitted to survive and flourish than others. Leaving on one side the pertinent question as to who exactly were the Anglo-Saxons, and late nineteenth-century imperialists usually did, there was a common agreement that their assumed progeny, the British, represented a super-race. This conclusion could be justified in terms of material, scientific and intellectual progress and adaptability. The fact that the Anglo-Saxons had dispersed across the globe and mastered their environment added to the general feeling that they were ideally qualified to rule.¹³

In identifying the integrity of the indigenous culture through the actions and attitudes of Dain and Nina, Conrad would appear to be engaged in an exercise similar to that of Stevenson in 'The Beach of Falesá'. In Stevenson's text, value might be said to reside in the character of Uma, rather than in any of the Anglo-Saxon characters.

'The Beach of Falesá', written at the height of Stevenson's creative powers, is in many respects perhaps, a more obviously crafted novel than *Almayer's Folly*, which is much more the product of a tentative author casting around for an idiom to suit his subject matter. However, there is evidence of the same detachment and irony so characteristic of Stevenson's later fiction in this text. In the above extract, Almayer's precipitous decline is related in the form of a self-revelatory narrative that results in an almost melodramatic reaction to the failure of his project. Ian Watt, in his 'Introduction' to the novel in *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Joseph Conrad*, suggests this explanation of Almayer's behaviour:

The decaying house remains, of course, as an appropriate material symbol for Almayer's folly in the other main sense - it is a monument to his foolishness.

But folly in the sense of mere foolishness seems to have too little moral weight to bear the main burden of the novel's theme. Here a matter of linguistic connotation may be involved. In French, quite apart from its special meaning for an absurdly costly building or enterprise, the primary sense of 'folie' is not foolishness but madness. This much stronger usage was lost when the word was naturalized in English; but Conrad's prior knowledge of French may have led him to assume that his title would cover a wider range of meanings than it does, including that of actual insanity. After Nina's departure, Almayer's mental state can justly be described as madness; but that final collapse is merely the culmination of Almayer's lifelong schizophrenic division between his inner picture of himself and what he actually is and does; his whole existence has been a continuously accelerating process of protecting his ego ideal by insulating it from reality. [Introduction, lx-lxi]

There are several important strands in Watt's argument which require analysis and elaboration. The significance of the linguistic variables as identified by Watt is acknowledged and accepted, but it is debatable whether or not Almayer's mental state *before* Nina's departure is indicative of any greater sense of stability. That is not to suggest that Almayer was always mad, but rather to show a dislocation from reality that is based on the assumptions of superiority associated with Western views of the colonial Other. It is, *perhaps*, delusion that constitutes the nature of Almayer's 'madness'. Watt's interpretation of Almayer's 'lifelong schizophrenic division' focuses on the interstitial zone between self-perception and public image that is, Watt seems to suggest, based upon Almayer's self-delusion. It may, however, be possible to offer an alternative reading of Almayer's predicament, and indeed the predicaments of several characters in the fiction of both Stevenson and Conrad in this period, by considering them in relation to processes going on around them. Almayer, like Wiltshire and Kurtz, is caught in an untenable relationship both to the macrocosmic business of 'Empire' and to the microcosmic representation of such imperialist competition as it is

manifested in Sambir. Almayer's hopes of riches are dashed and his decline assured: there is a sense in which he no longer fits anywhere, neither in the community of Sambir nor as part of the colonising community: his pre-occupation is with economic self-interest rather than with the grandiose structures of imperial power. Almayer's 'madness', if that is what it is, is connected to frustrated ambition: he cannot indulge his desire for 'progress' and the latter term is indeed a value judgement which requires some discussion.

Conrad and Stevenson knew enough about the workings of Empire at first hand to understand that many, if not all, of the underlying assumptions that formed the bedrock of Empire were predicated on racial superiority. Almayer's assumption of the same superiority backfires due to circumstances beyond his control and the results are devastating for him. Nina's escape from Sambir with Dain and the subsequent birth of their son further emphasises Almayer's hopelessness and his addiction to opium closely mirrors the plight of Captain Billy Randall in 'The Beach of Falesá'. Almayer is motivated to facilitate the escape of his daughter and her lover on the grounds that he will be disgraced in the island's community if it is known that Nina has been attracted to a native. Almayer's opium addiction propels him towards death and the closing passage of the novel contains several ironies associated with the changing power dynamics of Sambir:

Abdulla made a few paces forward and found himself for the last time face to face with his old enemy. Whatever he might have been once he was not dangerous now lying stiff and lifeless in the tender light of the early day. The only white man on the East coast was dead; and his soul delivered from the trammels of his earthly folly, stood now in the presence of Infinite Wisdom. On the upturned face there was that serene look which follows the sudden relief from anguish and pain, and it testified silently before the

cloudless heaven that the man lying there under the gaze of indifferent eyes had been permitted to forget before he died.

[AF, 155]

Any attempt to predict the future of Western colonialism that dominates the thematic structure of *Almayer's Folly* is complicated here as Conrad shows the emergence of a Muslim hegemony which will mount a challenge to European rule. In essence, Sambir will continue to be a battleground in much the same way as Africa, or the Polynesian islands, will constitute a similarly contentious area.

*An Outcast of the Islands*¹⁴, published in 1896, deals with the political intrigue in Sambir during the twenty years or more leading up to the action of *Almayer's Folly*. The thematic linkage to the latter text is clear and the deterioration of the central character Willems, mirrors Almayer's decline in the later work. More importantly, *An Outcast of the Islands* also focuses on the corrosive influence of whites on the indigenous culture. In one respect, the impact is arguably greater because Lingard's intention is to bring benefit to the population.

Again, there is a sense in which Conrad's character, Willems, bears a resemblance to Wiltshire. Here is another essentially empty figure attracted to the margins of Empire in search of meaning in an otherwise meaningless existence. The subject-matter is that of proto-Modernism once again: Conrad foregrounds the importance of predicament in the literature of this interstitial period between adventure writing in its purest form, for example in the works of Ballantyne and Haggard, and the existential concerns of later High Modernism.

The significance of Lingard's role is that in a mis-judgement similar to that he would make in respect of Almayer, he invests Willems with qualities he does not possess. In much the same way that Almayer turned out to be less useful than Lingard had predicted, Willems too turns out to be an essentially worthless man. His decline is, like Almayer's, based on corruption and greed and his willing involvement in illegal trade costs him an outwardly respectable job and gives impetus to his deterioration. What is significant about Lingard's blindness in respect of Willems's flaws is that it results, perhaps, from the fact that Willems's European origin entitles him, in Lingard's value system, to be regarded as unquestionably worthy. Employed as a confidential clerk by Hudig, Willems is placed in a position of trust and is tempted:

He thought of the trip to Lombok for ponies - that first important transaction confided to him by Hudig; then he reviewed the more important affairs: the quiet deal in opium; the illegal traffic in gunpowder; the great affair of smuggled firearms, the difficult business of the Rajah of Goak. He carried that last through by sheer pluck; he had bearded the savage old ruler in his council room; he had bribed him with a gilt glass coach, which, rumour said, was used as a hen-coop now; he had over-persuaded him; he had bested him in every way. That was the way to get on. He disapproved of the elementary dishonesty that dips the hand in the cash-box, but one could evade the laws and push the principles of trade to their furthest consequences. Some call that cheating. Those are the fools, the weak, the contemptible. The wise, the strong, the respected, have no scruples. Where there are scruples there can be no power. On that text he preached often to the young men. It was his doctrine, and he, himself, was a shining example of its truth. [AO, 8]

Willems's fall stands as a metaphor for all that is corrupt in mankind in general, and in the colonial drive for power and wealth in particular. The fall from grace is a potent motif which will recur in later Conrad works and is particularly important in Stevenson's *The Ebb Tide*. The representation of corruption as a malignant cancer will also be a central theme in *Heart of Darkness*. The significance of Willems's corruption is

that it is a microcosmic replication of the corruption that is at the core of Empire: he is futilely engaged in deceiving those who are themselves completely without scruples. Willems's hollowness and lack of substance is mis-read by Lingard and Conrad casts doubt on Lingard's ability to see fault in a white man transposed to an alien environment. Lingard looks to establish justification for Willems's behaviour where none can exist and in doing so allows him further opportunities to extend his corrupt influence.

The Dantesque figure of circles within circles is apposite as the structures of deceit and dishonesty extend outward from the capitals of Europe: English, Scottish, Dutch, Belgian adventurers pervade Conrad's novels of the closing years of the nineteenth century. These are not the adventurers of pro-European imperialist writing, despatched to 'civilize' and 'evangelize': neither is there the jingoistic flavour of 'The White Man's Burden' in *Almayer's Folly* or *An Outcast of the Islands*. The impression created in both texts is one of, at best, bungling interference in the case of Lingard, or blatant exploitation in the example of Willems.

In certain respects, *An Outcast of the Islands* is similar to *Almayer's Folly*. It is populated by the same characters and located in the same terrain and it deals with broadly similar themes, therefore it may be considered here more briefly than the former work. However, there are several important features of the text which indicate links to Conrad's later fiction and to the South Seas writings of Stevenson. For example, the location of the action in Sambir is worthy of note. Sambir, like Falesá, is a relatively insignificant *locus* and this apparent insignificance has the

effect of emphasising Willems's failures. Even Willems's best efforts are destined to be frustrated, but he is caught in a competitive climate similar to that of Wiltshire and Case in Stevenson's text.

Willems's denial of the possibility of honourable service in the employ of Hudig is significant. It is as if once again, a connection is established between an alien location and the removal of the constraints of civilised behaviour. Conrad establishes the inevitability of corruption and regression to atavism where European culture collides with robust indigenous resistance.

The identification of potential weakness as a result of the disorientation experienced by a man removed from the comforts of his Western background surfaces in Lingard's rescue of Willems on two separate occasions. The first example occurs when Willems is a street-urchin in the Netherlands:

Lingard learned in half an hour all that there was of Willems' commonplace story. Father outdoor clerk of some ship-broker in Rotterdam; mother dead. The boy quick in learning, but idle in school. The straitened circumstances in the house filled with small brothers and sisters, sufficiently clothed and fed but otherwise running wild, while the disconsolate widower tramped about all day in a shabby overcoat and imperfect boots on the muddy quays, and in the evening piloted wearily the half-intoxicated foreign skippers amongst the places of cheap delights, returning home late, sick with too much smoking and drinking - for company's sake - with these men, who expected such attentions in the way of business. Then the offer of the good-natured captain of *Kosmopoliet IV.*, who was pleased to do something for the patient and obliging fellow; young Willems' great joy, his still greater disappointment with the sea that looked so charming from afar, but proved so hard and exacting on closer acquaintance - and then this running away by a sudden impulse. [AO, 16-17]

Conrad emphasises Willems's ready intelligence and ability but contrasts these attributes with character defects: Willems is lazy and incapable of grasping an opportunity for self-improvement when it presents itself. Underlying this observation is Conrad's on-going concern

with the maintenance of the standards of the sea. Willems, Conrad goes on to illustrate, has another fatal flaw:

The boy was hopelessly at variance with the spirit of the sea. He had an instinctive contempt for the honest simplicity of that work which led to nothing he cared for. Lingard soon found this out. He offered to send him home in an English ship, but the boy begged hard to be permitted to remain. He wrote a beautiful hand, became soon perfect in English, was quick at figures; and Lingard made him useful in that way. [AO, 17]

Conrad invests the master mariner with attributes of reliability of character that provide insights into the nature of Lingard's affection for Willems. Willems is the antithesis of the man of integrity Conrad figures the mariner to be, as the foregoing extract reveals. Willems's failure to settle to life at sea can therefore be read as a negative and prophetic event.

Willems eventually, perhaps inevitably, betrays Lingard's trust, but not before he demonstrates considerable ability in the service of Hudig. Conrad may be suggesting that Willems, a nineteenth-century Everyman, harbours the potential for good or evil, but in the circumstances he finds himself, his capacity for good is negated. Conrad outlines his development in an explanatory passage early in the narrative:

As he grew older his trading instincts developed themselves astonishingly, and Lingard left him often to trade in one island or another while he, himself, made an intermediate trip to some out-of-the-way place. On Willems expressing a wish to that effect, Lingard let him enter Hudig's service. He felt a little sore at that abandonment because he had attached himself, in a way, to his protégé. Still he was proud of him, and spoke up for him loyally. At first it was "Smart boy that – never make a seaman though." Then when Willems was helping in the trading he referred to him as "that clever young fellow." Later when Willems became the confidential agent of Hudig, employed in many a delicate affair, the simple-hearted old seaman would point an admiring finger at his back and whisper to whoever stood near at the moment, "Long-headed chap that; deuced long-headed chap. Look at him. Confidential man of old Hudig. I picked him up in a ditch, you may say, like a starved cat. Skin and bone. 'Pon my word I did. And now he knows more than I do about island trading. Fact. I am not joking. More than I do," he would repeat, seriously, with innocent pride in his honest eyes.

From the safe elevation of his commercial successes Willems patronized Lingard. He had a liking for his benefactor, not unmixed with

some disdain for the crude directness of the old fellow's methods of conduct. There were, however, certain sides of Lingard's character for which Willems felt a qualified respect. The talkative seaman knew how to be silent on certain matters that to Willems were very interesting. Besides, Lingard was rich, and that in itself was enough to compel Willems's unwilling admiration.

[AO, 17-18]

Once again, there is a wealth of insight into Lingard's appraisal of Willems's character in this extract. It becomes clear that Lingard is blinded to several of Willems's flaws because of the circumstances of their first meeting and because of his paternal feelings towards Willems. The narrative voice is one of wry worldliness and it exonerates Lingard's skewed vision of Willems's alleged attributes. Willems's disdain in relation to Lingard's 'crude directness' suggests a connection to a major theme in Stevenson's *Weir of Hermiston* in which Adam Weir's broad Scots is associated with honesty and integrity, and is contrasted against the glib suavity of Frank Innes's Standard English. Of course, Weir's Scots is also associated with a coarseness and brutality which is absent in Lingard, and so, without attempting to construct a clear cut binary distinction, it may be suggested that Lingard's straightforwardness is associated with honesty. Lingard is obviously a shrewd enough judge of character to recognise Willems's unsuitability for the rigours of sea-faring, and Conrad equates sea-faring, and moreover, mastery of a vessel, with both manliness and integrity.

The equation of sea-faring ability and integrity is, of course, central to Davis's predicament in *The Ebb Tide* and the comparison of Randall and Marlow has already been remarked upon. However, the character of Willems is sufficiently flawed that he cannot be compared favourably alongside, for example, Marlow. Conrad presents Willems as a self-

seeking opportunist: a man to be compared with Case rather than Marlow. He is a man who uses Lingard for his own ends and is ruthlessly unscrupulous in exploiting his mentor's affections. Willems's facility for languages and figures impresses Lingard out of all proportion, but the reader senses an indefinable sense of regret on the part of Lingard that his *protégé* does not share his love of maritime adventure.

The doubts cast upon Willems's character because of this short-coming prove to justified. He comes to embody the morally bankrupt and emotionally hollow imperialist presence that seeks only gratification at the expense of the indigenous population, or, more accurately, that element of the indigenous population which, in looking to establish a relationship with the coloniser, is consumed by him. Such a relationship need not be based on a moral premise: both *Almayer's Folly* and *An Outcast of the Islands* feature relationships founded on purely expedient grounds. However, it is worth noting that the equation of indigenous populations with *naivete* and innocence is a gross over-simplification of the issues addressed both by Conrad and Stevenson in these anti-imperialist texts.

In contrast to Willems's commercial astuteness, he shares with fellow 'hollow men' Case, Randall, Kurtz, and Herrick, a common heritage of disorientation in the 'uncivilised' interior. This phenomenon is remarked upon in *Almayer's Folly* and *An Outcast of the Islands*, and reaches its apogee in *Heart of Darkness*.

The second of Lingard's rescues occurs when Willems is dismissed from Hudig's service for theft following a run of heavy gambling losses. The breach of trust on Willems's part is extreme: Hudig has married off

his daughter to Willems and has provided the couple with a home. Conrad describes Willems's self-created predicament in terms that give further insight into his, Willems's, character and give substance to Lingard's earlier misgivings:

The opportunity and the temptation were too much for Willems, and under the pressure of sudden necessity he abused that trust which was his pride, the perpetual sign of his cleverness and a load too heavy for him to carry. A run of bad luck at cards, the failure of a small speculation undertaken on his own account, an unexpected demand for money from one or another member of the Da Souza family - and almost before he was well aware of it he was off the path of his peculiar honesty. It was a faint and ill-defined track that it took him some time to find out how far he had strayed amongst the brambles of the dangerous wilderness he had been skirting for so many years, without any other guide than his own convenience and that doctrine of success which he had found for himself in the book of life - in those interesting chapters that the Devil has been permitted to write in it, to test the sharpness of men's eyesight and the steadfastness of their hearts.

[AO, 21]

Conrad once again equates clarity of vision with integrity and Willems is demonstrably suffering from moral and spiritual blindness. It is Willems's weakness that is foregrounded in *An Outcast of the Islands* as he experiences a fall from grace similar to that experienced by Almayer in the earlier text. Like so many of the characters under consideration here, Willems is a mediocrity: he has only his racial and cultural assumptions to mark him out from the allegedly inferior 'natives'. Conrad demonstrates a further, and ultimately damning trait: Willems refuses to face up to the magnitude of his decline:

As the sound of Hudig's insults that lingered in his ears grew fainter by the lapse of time, the feeling of shame was replaced slowly by a passion of anger against himself and still more against the stupid concourse of circumstances that had driven him into his idiotic indiscretion. Idiotic indiscretion; that is how he defined his guilt to himself. Could there be anything worse from the point of view of his undeniable cleverness? What a fatal aberration of an acute mind! He did not recognize himself there. He must have been mad. That's it. A sudden gust of madness. And now the work of long years was destroyed utterly. What would become of him?

[AO, 22-23]

The degree to which Willems feels resentment rather than remorse illustrates the nature and depth of Willems's fall and emphasises the extent to which he attempts to shift the responsibility for his shortcomings. Willems's breach of trust, the theft from his father-in-law and employer is over-ridden by an explanation of temporary madness. Conrad demonstrates Willems's moral vacuity in this passage and permits the reader access to Willems's rationalisation of his predicament. Significantly, at no point in this passage does Conrad portray Willems engaged in any expression of remorse. Willems's sole regret is associated to the discovery of his dishonesty rather than with the dishonesty itself. He wonders why his cleverness deserted him rather than facing up to his moral weakness. It is a particularly acute insight into his character and equates with Almayer's response to his broken dreams. Neither Almayer nor Willems can summon up the straightforward veracity to assume personal responsibility for the circumstances in which they find themselves: both are morally worthless.

When Willems is extricated from his predicament by Lingard and is set down in Sambir alongside Almayer and Babalatchi, he meets the daughter of the old blind man, Omar. Aissa embodies a natural and essentially free spirit Willems finds irresistible:

He was looking around for help. This silence, this immobility of his surroundings seemed to him a cold rebuke, a stern refusal, a cruel unconcern. There was no safety outside of himself – and in himself there was no refuge; there was only the image of that woman. He had a sudden moment of lucidity – of that cruel lucidity that comes once in life to the most benighted. He seemed to see what went on within him, and was horrified at the strange sight. He, a white man whose worst fault till then had been a little want of judgment and too much confidence in the rectitude of his kind! That woman was a complete savage, and... He tried to tell himself that the thing was of no

consequence. It was a vain effort. The novelty of the sensations he had never experienced before in the slightest degree, yet had despised on hearsay from his safe position of a civilized man, destroyed his courage. He was disappointed with himself. He seemed to be surrendering to a wild creature the unstained purity of his life, of his race, of his civilization. [AO, 80]

Conrad sustains the impression of self-delusion on Willems's part as he does in tracing the decline of Almayer, but what is interesting is the focus on an exotic woman, a recurring motif in the fiction of the period. It is a motif which is also encountered in Stevenson in 'The Beach of Falesá', of course. This picture of womanhood, however, does not correspond to the image of the middle-class Victorian matriarch. Aissa, in common with Uma, is a potent, sexual force and threatens white male supremacy through her very attraction. The secondary effect of this attraction, for Willems, is a feeling of weakness and degeneration. Unlike Stevenson's treatment which conveys the sexuality in the relationship between Wiltshire and Uma as a matter of mutual attraction, Conrad rather over-dramatises the Aissa-Willems match as a relationship which reduces Willems to the status of slave. Conrad formulates a sexual inversion that is radical in its implications for the nineteenth-century reader: here is a non-white woman capable of subordinating a white male to her will. White middle-class women could be placed on pedestals, but Conrad's attempt to create a parallel fails on the grounds of improbability.

The crucial point, however, is that Conrad offers the reader the opportunity to consider the relationship in the first place: he addresses the same taboo of miscegenation that Stevenson was criticised for in 'The Beach of Falesá'.

Aissa is the agent of Willems's final collapse because he betrays the location of Lingard's secret river, and she passes the information on to

Abdullah, the Arab trader and Lingard's rival. The means by which the betrayal is effected is complicated by the involvement of the arch-politician, Babalatchi, who has removed Aissa from Willems in order to gain advantage. The disappearance of Aissa reduces Willems to near-madness and his predicament is exacerbated because Lingard is not on hand to help him. Willems is, in common with Almayer, condemned to failure in a final irony. He is killed by Aissa: the woman who had earlier saved his life.

Willems's destruction, like Almayer's, is associated with a failure of vision, that is to say, a failure to comprehend fully the machinations going on around him. The moment of personal insight may be simply another manifestation of the self-delusion that has been a characteristic of Willems from the outset, and a trait shared with Almayer. Conrad appears to link clarity of vision and comprehension as inseparable elemental components in both *Almayer's Folly* and *An Outcast of the Islands*. Alan Sandison, discussing Conrad in *The Wheel of Empire*, makes the suggestion that the aforementioned failure to apprehend reality is at the core of the Malay novels. He writes:

The whole account of the Aissa/Willems relationship – indeed the whole theme of *An Outcast of the Islands*, is one of complete incomprehension: of that incomprehension which exposes and ultimately destroys a man. The unfolding story is graduated by the slow disintegration of Willems, as his moral being, fragment by fragment, drops back into pre-social chaos. First the exotic attracts, then it puzzles, then it repels; and finally, given no relief, destroys.¹⁵

Conrad illustrates the difficulties of communication between cultures and it may be deduced from his treatment of Aissa and Willems's relationship that he believes such a cultural chasm to be unbridgeable. The relational complexities encountered by Europeans such as Willems, or

Wiltshire, as they come into contact with the colonial Other are central to proto-Modernist accounts of the Imperial project. It is important to note, once again, that the focus is firmly on the predicament of the agent of colonization: this focal emphasis is a trope that marks these texts as products of a particular epoch. An important corollary to the issue of divided cultures is the treatment of women in the fiction of the late-nineteenth century, especially fiction that addresses themes of imperialism and colonial expansion.

The assumptions underlying the treatment of colonial women afford important insights into the relationships described in the fiction of Stevenson and Conrad. Yvonne Kniebihler and Regine Goutalier, in *La Femme au Temps des Colonies*, describe the predicament of colonial women thus: "Everything takes place as if the colonies were the harems of the West."¹⁶ Stevenson indicates as much in the 'A South Sea Bridal' episode of 'The Beach of Falesá', as the whites demean Uma during the sham ceremony in Randall's trading-station. Both Stevenson and Conrad foreground the contrasting politics of different cultures. Wiltshire's subsequent pang of conscience is significant on a personal level, but it does little to dispel the impression that native women exist for the entertainment of the Europeans. There is evidence to suggest in *An Outcast of the Islands*, and to an even greater extent, perhaps, in *Heart of Darkness*, that Conrad identified the native woman with the exotic and acknowledged that she had become an object of desire for the European male. Conrad had travelled extensively by the time he began to write

seriously and he would have been familiar with the dynamics of colonial outposts in the Far East.

In *The Rhetoric of Empire*, David Spurr advances the following argument with regard to the relationship of Europeans to colonial women:

Charles Allen's glossary of Anglo-African slang tells us that among British colonial officers the euphemism for an African mistress was 'sleeping dictionary.' (164) Colonial officers were required to learn native languages, and native mistresses could provide a relatively painless form of language instruction. Beyond this prosaic etymology, however, the metaphor suggests an entire series of unstated connections between the sexual and the lexical. It suggests, for example, that the African woman is a text to be opened and closed at will, and whose contents allow entry into the mysteries of African language; that this language, and by extension African culture, is itself both contained within and revealed by the female body; that sexual knowledge of her body is knowledge of Africa itself.¹⁷

Spurr's assertion that sexual knowledge functions as a metaphor for cultural knowledge does not appear to operate in the early Conrad texts: indeed, there is little evidence to support Spurr's view where the protagonists of *Almayer's Folly* and *An Outcast of the Islands* are concerned. Failure to comprehend the culture of the Other is not necessarily bound up in sexual predation in Conrad; it is a wider issue of meaning and communication of meaning between radically different groups.

In *An Outcast of the Islands*, Conrad examines the effects of outside interference in the workings of an indigenous community. Lingard may represent, like Wiltshire, the acceptable face of the colonising power, however, Conrad maintains the negative presence of Willems as a counter-balance and as the primary focus of the novel. Conrad introduces Willems to the reader when his central character is about to fall, at the point where *hybris* must inevitably bring about *nemesis*. Willems shares

Almayer's propensity for self-delusion and his decline can be apportioned to his incapacity to see clearly the moral issues which face him. Conrad may be emphasising the difference between Willems and the local population, especially Babalatchi, who sees everything in a crystalline light while reality is obscured for Willems. In an inversion of the coloniser's relegation of the Other to the status of savage, Willems is portrayed as the representative of the atavistic: his dreams shattered, his world disintegrates.

The business of Empire was still very much in common vogue during the 1890s, if admittedly in decline, and the assumption of rights in relation to the conduct of trade with supposedly inferior racial groups is challenged by writers such as Stevenson and Conrad. Both writers seem to suggest a loss of direction on the part of individuals such as Wiltshire and Lingard. As the Empire declines, so these men are at a loss about how to respond to changing circumstances in the face of emerging nations. This process is clearly at a nascent stage in both *Almayer's Folly* and *An Outcast of the Islands* but it exists nevertheless in the figures of Babalatchi and Abdullah, the new challengers to Western hegemony. It may, perhaps, be assumed that Conrad, like Stevenson, struggles to make sense of the new order, but there is an awareness of the inevitability of the need to allow that process to develop. It is important to note that there is no clear epistemic break between the epoch of High Imperialism and its decline. Instead there is a process in which the privileged Other emerges to form a new, indigenous power which will trade with European commercial interests rather than attempt to oppose them by force of arms.

In *An Outcast of the Islands* that process is charted in terms of the decline of Lingard's potency as a trader and it culminates in the loss of his vessel. Lingard's predicament follows as a result of Willems's betrayal and there are resonances of actual events in the acquisition of Empire where policy was made retrospectively, such as the methods of Rhodes would suggest. The parallel is attractive because it illustrates the means by which agents might undermine the intentions of the principal.¹⁸ Lingard and Willems both fail, the winners are the wily Babalatchi and Abdullah: they have challenged the supremacy of the whites and have won. Conrad's fascination with the Malayan archipelago would provide the impetus for several major works but, in terms of his early fiction, a short story published in *Tales of Unrest*¹⁹, 'Karain', typifies that obsessive interest in the region.

'Karain: A Memory' is a significant work for two reasons: it marks the introduction of a narrative voice which in turn anticipates that of Marlow, and it is at once a voice that undermines certainty. The reader can never be sure of Conrad's intentions, of course, but the introduction of this narrative voice problematises the relationship of author and reader even further. Again, the theme of white interference in the affairs of an indigenous population is central to the narrative although Conrad is experimenting with a method of concealing the most important themes until a climax can be effected.

Conrad establishes Karain as an enigmatic leader on one level, but the impression of calm resolution is undercut by the reliance Karain places on his ever-present sword-bearer:

Karain never moved without that attendant, who stood or squatted close at his back. He had a dislike of an open space behind him. It was more than a dislike – it resembled fear, a nervous preoccupation of what went on where he could not see. This, in view of the evident and fierce loyalty that surrounded him, was inexplicable. He was there alone in the midst of devoted men; he was safe from neighbourly ambushes, from fraternal ambitions; and yet more than one of our visitors had assured us that their ruler could not bear to be alone. [K, 19]

Karain has a secret to protect and the narrative is two-thirds advanced before the reader is fully aware of the import of that secret. Conrad conceals and obfuscates, metaphorically blocking the reader's line of vision. The revelation of Karain's secret is remarkable for its impressionistic richness. Conrad employs striking imagery and, more significantly in terms of his literary development, he uses the device of a narration within a narration: a strategy he will also use to distance the reader from the action in *Heart of Darkness*. 'Karain', like *Almayer's Folly* and *An Outcast of the Islands*, contains important elements that connect Conrad to two traditions: conventional adventure fiction and the symbolic references central to Modernist literary style.

'Karain' foregrounds the issue of external, European involvement in an Eastern setting and is based on the relationship between a native girl and a Dutch trader. The potential for a straightforward adventure yarn exists in a parallel to the Dain Maroola-Nina elopement episode in *Almayer's Folly*, but Conrad undercuts the exotic appeal of Karain and his colourful band by emphasising the attractiveness of the Dutchman.

The narrative creates a sense of uncertainty in the reader because of the impression of circularity and evasion on the part of Karain himself. The tale is an experiment in narrative technique that goes beyond the methodology of either *Almayer's Folly* or *An Outcast of the Islands*.

Essentially, Conrad's technique is to distance the two narrative lines. The ship's captain's narrative which is more ironic and detached, perhaps, can be read as a verbatim account of events, but the problematic element in Karain's narrative is integrally connected to the discourse he utilises to tell his story. These diverging discourses point up one essential difficulty: competing cultures use different language forms to convey meaning, and different values are placed on each. Karain personifies the culture which can absorb and neutralize the most brutal effects of the colonizer but which remains vulnerable because of its traditional value system. However, Conrad dislocates Karain from his cultural roots following the killing of Pata Matara.

Conrad comes close to, but ultimately manages to avoid, reducing the concluding action to a moralising comment on the superstitions of the 'inferior' races. The following passage illustrates the point:

He held it up. It was a sixpence – a Jubilee sixpence. It was gilt; it had a hole punched near the rim. Hollis looked towards Karain.

'A charm for our friend,' he said to us. 'The thing itself is of great power – money, you know – and his imagination is struck. A loyal vagabond; if only his puritanism doesn't shy at a likeness...'

We said nothing. We did not know whether to be scandalized, amused or relieved. Hollis advanced towards Karain, who stood up as if startled, and then, holding the coin up, spoke in Malay.

'This is the image of the Great Queen, and the most powerful thing the white men know,' he said, solemnly.

Karain covered the handle of his kriss in sign of respect, and stared at the crowned head.

'The Invincible, the Pious,' he muttered.

'She is more powerful than Suleiman the Wise, who commanded the genii, as you know,' said Hollis, gravely. 'I shall give this to you.'

He held the sixpence in the palm of his hand, and looking at it thoughtfully, spoke to us in English.

'She commands a spirit, too – the spirit of her nation; a masterful, conscientious, unscrupulous, unconquerable devil...that does a lot of good – incidentally...a lot of good...at times – and wouldn't stand any fuss from the best ghost out for such a little thing as our friend's shot. Don't look thunderstruck, you fellows. Help me to make him believe – everything's in that.' [K, 51]

Hollis attaches a ribbon to the coin and places it around Karain's neck as a talisman to ward off the apparition: Karain is freed from the demons of his past. That Karain is freed by white men, the white men who serve the 'Great Queen', is imbued with significance. However, it is perhaps less important than Conrad's main theme which is again decline and deterioration predicated by broken dreams. Conrad appears to acknowledge in the references to the deception practised on Karain, his own ambivalent position in relation to the imperialist assumptions he criticises. 'Karain' acquires a significance beyond its apparent, surface value when it is considered as a way-mark in Conrad's development as a proto-Modernist writer. In this short story, Conrad not only experiments with form, which is important in establishing the nature of his fiction in this period, but he also examines his attitudes towards the treatment of indigenous cultures by Europeans. The two issues are to be taken together: the search for a new form may stem from a perception that the conventional forms of adventure fiction prove to be inadequate frameworks within which to analyze the cataclysmic events of a declining Empire. The concomitant effect of this process on whites compelled for the first time to consider the future locates the text at the threshold of Modernist writing.

In 'Karain', Conrad finds a narrative voice with which to explore the inner workings of the human psyche and, additionally, he moves closer to an analysis of the competing discourses of cultures in collision, as the Western economic powers seek expansion into Africa. *Almayer's Folly*, *An Outcast of the Islands* and 'Karain' are important stages in Conrad's

development as a novelist moving towards discussions of some of the major issues of the nineteenth century. As Stevenson's 'The Beach of Falesá' indicates a progression towards the proto-Modernist text *The Ebb Tide*, so these three texts indicate a similar progression towards discussions of central importance to early Modernist literature. They specifically demonstrate links to the texts which embody Conrad's fascination with Africa: 'An Outpost of Progress' and *Heart of Darkness*. Conrad's failed heroes, the central characters of the Malay Archipelago fiction of the 1894-97 period are important in that they are prototypes for the characters who will establish Conrad as a key contributor to the body of Modernist fiction. In these rather tentative *chiaroscuro* sketches, the characters may be perceived to possess the two-dimensional nature of stereotypes, deployed simply to propel the narrative line. However, they contain the elements of characterisation Conrad will go on to develop in Kayerts and Carlier, themselves prototypes for Kurtz in *Heart of Darkness* and Axel Heyst in *Victory*.

Conrad's Eastern fiction may be said to prepare the way for discussion of some of the major issues central to the following chapter, but it is significant in its own right as a critical appraisal of the workings of the Imperial project. The movement away from the simpler forms of adventure writing towards sophisticated analysis of the issues of the moment is discernible across Conrad's fiction and there is an awareness of that process *within* the fiction of this period. Conrad's location on the fault line separating adventure fiction from Modernist writing has been established in the texts considered during the course of this chapter and

the movement towards a more fully integrated membership of the Modernist tradition will be outlined in an analysis of Conrad's African narratives. The location of Stevenson and Conrad in an interstitial zone in terms of the evolution of narrative will be investigated further in the context of imperial expansionism.

¹ Leonard Orr, 'Almayer's Folly (1895) and *An Outcast of the Islands* (1896)', in *A Joseph Conrad Companion*, ed. by Leonard Orr and Ted Billy (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1999), pp. 27-48 (p. 28).

² Ian Watt, *Conrad in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1980), p.43.

³ Joseph Conrad, *Almayer's Folly*, ed. by F.E. Eddleman and D.L. Higdon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p.5. Subsequent references are to this edition, and are given in brackets in the text.

⁴ For a comprehensive discussion of this subject see: Redmond O'Hanlon, *Joseph Conrad and Charles Darwin: The influence of scientific thought on Conrad's fiction* (Edinburgh: The Salamander Press, 1984).

⁵ Stevenson examines the nature of economic competition in the South Pacific, for example, in the chapter entitled 'The Elements of Discord: Foreign' in *A Footnote to History* (1892). His discussion outlines the nature of the impact of foreign interests on indigenous populations.

⁶ Patrick Brantlinger, 'Race and the Victorian Novel', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Victorian Novel*, ed. by Deirdre David (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 149-168 (p. 154)

⁷ Elizabeth Bronfen, 'Hysterical and Obsessional Discourse: Responding to Death in *Dracula*', in *Dracula: Contemporary Critical Essays*, ed. and with an 'Introduction' by Glennis Byron (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), pp. 55-67 (p. 62).

⁸ For discussion of the Eurasian issue, see Owen Knowles's 'Introduction' (1995) to *Almayer's Folly* (London: J.M Dent, 1995), pp. xvii-xliii (p. xxxi)

⁹ 'Orang Blanda' (Malay) 'orang' = 'man', 'belanda' = 'Holland'.

¹⁰ William Wordsworth, *The Fourteen-Book 'Prelude'*, ed. by W.J.B. Owen (Ithaca, NY., 1985), p.236 (ll.128-9)

¹¹ Chris Bongie, 'A Man of the Last Hour', in *Joseph Conrad*, Longman Critical Readers Series, ed. and with an 'Introduction' by Andrew Michael Roberts (London & New York: Longman, 1998), pp. 124-151 (pp.132-33).

¹² James refers to Seeley's *The Expansion of England* (1882), a text that became a best-seller.

¹³ Lawrence James, *The Rise and Fall of the British Empire* (London: Abacus, 1995), p.205.

¹⁴ Joseph Conrad, *An Outcast of the Islands* (London: J.M Dent & Sons Ltd., 1949)

¹⁵ Alan Sandison, *The Wheel of Empire* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1967), p.125.

¹⁶ Yvonne Kniebihler and Regine Goutalier, *La Femme au Temps des Colonies* (Paris: Stock, 1985), p. 21.

¹⁷ David Spurr, *The Rhetoric of Empire* (Durham, N.C. & London: Duke University Press, 1993), pp. 170-71.

¹⁸ For a full discussion of Rhodes see, Lawrence James, *The Rise and Fall of the British Empire*, pp.259-265.

¹⁹ Joseph Conrad, *Tales of Unrest* [1898] (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1978).

Greed and Degeneration: Proto-Modernist Perceptions of the Empire in Operation

Conrad develops several important themes in his African fiction that connect directly with *Almayer's Folly*, *An Outcast of the Islands* and 'Karain'. With the change of geographical location, Conrad evinces a greater critical awareness of the workings of Empire and in this respect 'An Outpost of Progress' (1898) and *Heart of Darkness* (1899) represent his bleakest appraisal of the exploitation of Central Africa.

Few texts similar in length to Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* can have generated so much critical attention, and such widely divergent criticism at that. From Achebe's blunt description of Conrad as a "thoroughgoing racist"¹ to various *apologia* offered by Conrad scholars², critics seem to be simultaneously attracted to this text and yet appear to be bewildered by its complexity. There may be observations to be made in this respect in relation to critics eager to have the text conform to a particular critical theory. For example, there is evidence to suggest that the text has been used in at least one 'critical edition' in order to illustrate possible approaches to *Heart of Darkness*³.

The present chapter will consider 'An Outpost of Progress' and *Heart of Darkness* within the wider context of a genre which is critical of European imperialism and colonialism. Additionally, an examination of the formal and structural elements of the text will be undertaken in order to illustrate the developmental process from Conrad's Malay fiction.

Some of the characteristics of these works will be analysed in order to relate them to the shaping discourse of fiction in the closing years of the nineteenth century and the opening years of the twentieth. Furthermore, it will be argued that a reading which suggests that the 'Heart of Darkness' is located in London, rather than in the Congo, is supported by Conrad's presentation of the narratorial centre on a yawl in the Thames. Additionally, Conrad's progression away from adventure romance towards more Modernist preoccupations will be discussed with close reference to both texts. It will be seen that *Heart of Darkness* underlines Conrad's break from his earlier narrative style in a process which parallels that of Stevenson in *The Ebb Tide*. Both writers can be observed to participate in a crossing of the proto-Modernist fault line established by Jameson, and Conrad's progression across that divide may be further discerned, arguably more clearly discerned, in the works under consideration in this chapter. The aforementioned process may have its genesis in 'An Outpost of Progress' and, therefore, it may prove helpful to begin an analysis of Conrad's African writing with this text.

In order to examine whether subsequent criticism of Conrad as a complicit participant in the dissemination of racist stereotyping is justified, and so address Achebe's assertion, it may prove useful to discuss how Conrad portrays the Europeans in 'An Outpost of Progress'. Such a process is not intended to represent yet another defence of Conrad, but rather to show that the ambivalence that characterises much of Stevenson's later fiction is also to be found in these Conrad texts. Moreover, in discussing 'An Outpost', emphasis will be focused on the

degenerative effect on the European bourgeoisie of dominating the subaltern Other. The text also prefigures some of the concerns of the emergent opposition to Empire which functions to destabilise late-Victorian confidence. Several key themes emerge in 'An Outpost of Progress' which will be developed in *Heart of Darkness*.

'An Outpost of Progress' focuses upon two white, bourgeois ivory traders of Belgian nationality, Kayerts and Carlier who are sent to a trading post in the Congo. The Belgian exploitation of central Africa certainly rivalled the British imperialist endeavour, perhaps even exceeding it in terms of its rapacity.⁴ Conrad illustrates the relationship between the hierarchical structures of the Great Trading Company and the class system of Europe in his portrayal of Kayerts and Carlier as low-level functionaries, but however responsibility is delegated to those functionaries, Conrad alludes to the ultimate responsibility lying for the effects of their activities elsewhere. In drafting this narrative, Conrad may have prefigured an actual historical event. In 1898, King Leopold II of Belgium issued a statement about the Congo, the tenor of which may be gathered from the following extract:

The mission which the agents of the state have to accomplish on the Congo is a noble one. They have to continue the development of civilisation in the centre of Equatorial Africa, receiving their inspiration directly from Berlin and Brussels. Placed face to face with primitive barbarism, grappling with sanguinary customs that date back thousands of years, they are obliged to reduce these gradually. They must accustom the population to general laws, of which the most needful and the most salutary is assuredly that of work.⁵

Leaving aside the sinister euphemism which would characterise statements made about 'primitives' by the European dictators only thirty years later, this statement contains many of the assumptions both Conrad

and Stevenson were to contest. The initial assumption that the European Powers were justified in their treatment of indigenous populations wherever they were encountered is taken to be axiomatic. Leopold's statement is also based on that central plank of Western capitalism, the Protestant work ethic. Conrad's text, of course, points up the irony in Leopold's statement and emphasises the King's lack of awareness at best, and ruthlessness at worst. The irony is there in the title of 'An Outpost of Progress' in sharp relief: there is no 'progress', instead there is regression and degeneration for whites and blacks alike.

Conrad, perhaps empathetically following Stevenson, subverts the sentiments of jingoistic imperialism and by doing so, highlights the hypocrisy at the core of the racist assumption. The extent to which Conrad can be said to 'follow' Stevenson is necessarily complex and rests, of course, on the assumption that he had read Stevenson in the first place. The issue has a history: Cedric Watts, in an explanatory note in *Joseph Conrad's Letters to Cunningham-Graham*⁶, illustrates the contemporary speculation regarding a connection between Conrad and Stevenson:

The *Saturday Review* for 12 February 1898 (LXXXV, 211) had included an anonymous⁷ review of *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'*. The reviewer had suggested that Conrad's early work suffered in comparison with Stevenson's, and might be derivative from it. He praised the description of the storm, but concluded:

'We are far from assuming plagiarism, unconscious or otherwise, and if "The Ebb Tide" had never been written, it is conceivable that Donkin might have established himself as the type [of the vicious cockney] instead [of Stevenson's Huish]. As it is, he only reminds us of somebody else. It cannot be said that the "Nigger" himself attains even that limited success. He wearies the reader from the outset, as one feels he bored and fatigued the writer.'

Further evidence of Conrad's awareness of Stevenson as a major literary figure can be seen in *The Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad*. The

examples given are from *Volume 2* of the collection and appear to reveal at least a degree of ambivalence towards Stevenson on the part of Conrad. The first reference is from a letter to Henley, Stevenson's erstwhile *confidante* prior to an altercation over Fanny Stevenson's authorship of 'The Nixie', which Henley attributed to Katherine de Mattos, Stevenson's cousin. Henley, by associating Conrad with Stevenson, elicited Conrad's reply, dated 18 October, 1898. Conrad's letter contains the following statement:

I have meditated your letter. The line of your argument has surprised me. R.L.S. – Dumas – these are big names and I assure You (sic) it had never occurred to me they could be pronounced in connection with my plan to work with Hueffer⁸.

In the second example, from a letter to the literary agent J.B. Pinker dated 8 January, 1902, Conrad reveals a negative response to Stevenson's fiction: 'I am no sort of airy R.L. Stevenson who considered his art a prostitute and the artist as no better than one.'⁹ Conrad's response may be related to a variety of difficulties he was experiencing as evidenced by comments made in the aforementioned letter. That Stevenson's name should be mentioned in letters spanning a four year period is, perhaps, indicative of Conrad's awareness of Stevenson as a prominent literary figure. In the context of the present study, it is sufficient evidence to support the view that Conrad knew of Stevenson's work and understood Stevenson to be regarded as a significant figure in contemporary writing.

In considering 'An Outpost of Progress' then, the fact that there is no identifiable 'progress' for anyone involved in the minutiae of imperial power exposes the lie at the centre of European colonialism. The belief in

the nobility of the task adds to the irony implicit in the title of Conrad's story, as does the belief in work as a force for redemption amongst those enslaved by 'sanguinary customs that date back thousands of years'. Conrad suggests the parallel enslavement of the indigenous African population by whites, but with even greater ironic potency, suggests the enslavement of whites because of greed.

Conrad appears to believe in the construct of civilisation as a barrier against the atavistic forces latent in the human species, an attitude perhaps predicated on the values of the High Victorian epoch and the belief in the cohesive nature of human society. In 'An Outpost of Progress', these values are subverted and Conrad illuminates another, darker, recess of the human spirit. The greed demonstrated by Kayerts and Carlier must stand as a central metaphor for western imperialism and its catastrophic impact upon the African continent. There is a further, and contradictory, element however. Conrad draws the topography of Africa on a scale of such vastness that it appears to render the outpost inconsequential, except that in using this device he emphasises not the hugeness of the continent but rather, paradoxically, the disproportionate impact upon it of relatively lowly whites. The significant factor here is not that a collision of two equally matched *cultures* occurs, it is rather that whites encounter an alien *landscape* within which powerful forces, with very different ideas about their specific rights in relation to material wealth, contest space. From the European viewpoint, the Africans have significance *only* to the extent they offer competition for the available wealth. The point is that Conrad emphasises, as does Stevenson in 'The Beach of Falesá', that the tawdry

and ignoble people who carry out the front-line assault on behalf of Empire are, most probably, on the road to degeneration *before* they encounter the Other. There is a sense in which these individuals have already failed prior to their arrival in Africa and this idea is carried forward from the themes of *Almayer's Folly* and *An Outcast of the Islands*, highlighting Conrad's growing anti-imperialist stance.

More problematically, Conrad uses language which modern readers find at best distasteful and more accurately, racist. This is especially true of his use of the word 'nigger'. This particular word may be the singular objection upon which many of the charges of racism rest, largely because of its emotive impact upon a twentieth century, and now twenty-first century readership. That is not to argue that the charges of racism are therefore invalidated or in any way neutralised. Indeed, it is important to note that the term 'nigger' had a pejorative quality as early as the seventeenth century. Rather than focusing on the etymology of the word, it is perhaps more helpful to suggest that Conrad, like Stevenson, is limited in the extent to which he can separate himself from assumptions of racial superiority linked to the values of the age. It due to their location on a 'fault line' that neither Stevenson nor Conrad can be associated with liberal, 'modern' descriptive terms for the colonial Other. Nevertheless, both writers are eager to attack greed and degeneration within the Empire, despite the fact that they are compromised by their relationship to the Imperialist project. The value in these texts lies in the extent to which they reveal the difficulties faced by writers aware of the evils of imperialism and who wish to reveal these to an essentially apathetic, or even hostile,

audience. Stevenson, arguably approaching the height of his literary powers in 'The Beach of Falesá', illustrates in his portrayal of Uma, a patronising paternalism that typifies much of the characterisation of indigenous characters in the fiction of the late-nineteenth century. Once again, because of his location on the 'fault line', Stevenson can be seen to embrace some of the assumptions of the age but, equally, he is prescient enough to attribute the greatest humanity to a non-white, Uma, in the climactic scene in 'The Beach of Falesá'. Similarly, although arguably not to the same degree, Conrad is critical of the imperialist whites but is mired in the same assumptions as Stevenson: he cannot envisage a cultural significance for the Africans beyond that of ciphers. Stevenson does *choose* to write in this way: that is to say, there is nothing inevitable about it, but the shaping discourse of the epoch is one which assumes one set of values for white Europeans and an entirely different set for other races. To this extent, both Conrad and Stevenson are representative of a tradition which challenges the jingoism of colonial ambition, but both are limited in the extent to which they can represent the aspirations of any nations other than whites. The characters both writers present are not the great driving forces of imperialism, they are small men, ordinary men in many respects. This brings the characters into contact with a readership that is not yet aware enough to be experiencing doubt about the morality of dispossessing other races on the basis of their different skin colour. In this important respect, the negative reception of 'The Beach of Falesá' may be explained by suggesting that Stevenson is, in fact, ahead of his readership.

Kayerts and Carlier are the donkey-men of Empire; they are not even well-regarded by their employer who, more or less, deposits them at the trading-post with minimal regard for their comfort or safety:

At any rate the director of the Great Trading Company, coming up in a steamer that resembled an enormous sardine box with a flat-roofed shed erected on it, found the station in good order, and Makola as usual quietly diligent. *The director had the cross put up over the first agent's grave, and appointed Kayerts to the post.* Carlier was told off as second in charge. The director was a man ruthless and efficient, who at times, but very imperceptibly, indulged in grim humour. He made a speech to Kayerts and Carlier, pointing out to them the promising aspect of their station. The nearest trading-post was about three hundred miles away. It was an exceptional opportunity for them to distinguish themselves and to earn percentages on the trade. *The appointment was a favour done to beginners.* Kayerts was moved almost to tears by his director's kindness. He would, he said, by doing his best, try to justify the flattering confidence, &c, &c. Kayerts had been in the Administration of the Telegraphs, and knew how to express himself correctly. Carlier, an ex-non-commissioned officer of cavalry in an army guaranteed from harm by several European Powers, was less impressed. If there were commissions to get, so much the better; and, trailing a sulky glance over the river, the forests, the impenetrable bush that seemed to cut off the station from the rest of the world, he muttered between his teeth, 'We shall see, very soon.'¹⁰ (my italics)

The managing director's treatment of Kayerts and Carlier seems to parallel the hegemonic experience of blacks under white rule: the relationship in this case is based on power derived from a superior hierarchical status rather than colour, but the result is similar. The conjunction of the erection of the cross on the first agent's grave and the appointment of Kayerts as his successor merits attention: the first agent is never named, his identity is ultimately unimportant because he is expendable and, by implication, so is Kayerts. The cross, imbued with centuries of significance in the Christian tradition, the symbol of salvation but also, significantly, of substitution, is here subverted in an ironical re-figuring which approaches the nihilistic. The promise of the first agent's cross, Conrad appears to suggest, is empty and the substitution of good for

sin is re-worked so that in this text, one sinner replaces another. It will be argued that very similar imagery indicates a connecting thematic strand in Stevenson's *The Ebb Tide*, in which the secular world also intrudes in a heavily ironic manner. The 'missionaries' are ministers of wanton greed and bear no relationship to those figures of evangelicalism bringing enlightenment to the 'dark races' as envisaged in Imperialism's grand narrative. Conrad's view of the relationship between Kayerts and Carlier and the Great Trading Company, as personified by the managing director, is predicated on the same principle of hegemonic transaction as functions between coloniser and colonised.

Kayerts presents an 'Uncle Tom' naivete in the face of the managing director's homily in a scene that indicates something of the attitudes Conrad is examining not only in relation to coloniser-colonised oppositions, but also to worker-manager. The paternalism extends beyond race to include anyone perceived to stand in an inferior relationship to the brokers of power. It is as if racial considerations were a by-product of a much more fundamental process based on the power to exert control over another; the tragic irony lies in the failure of the poor white to identify with the poor black and to recognise a common cause. This is the point at which the importance of ingrained attitudes in late-nineteenth-century society becomes critical. Conrad's critique of imperialism, devastating as it is, does not to any real extent connect with the predicament of the colonised. This, perhaps, constitutes the basis of Achebe's understandable objection to the text of *Heart of Darkness*. It appears that in the proto-Modernist novel of predicament, the predicament in question is

exclusively that of the white protagonist, a central issue in terms of the present study and one that denies a significant role to the colonial Other.

In an era when Britain could exert influence almost without fear of opposition, and on a global scale, the first readers of late-Victorian fiction were, perhaps understandably, disinclined to look beyond the obvious for an explanation of Britain's, or indeed Belgium's, ability to rule and administer colonial power. It is only in the recognition of the claims of competing foreign interests that Britain's confidence becomes less secure and builds into an almost neurotic xenophobia about anything which does not conform to the strict guidelines of the late-Victorian racial absolute.

'An Outpost of Progress' examines the underlying assumptions not only of the Belgian colonial mindset in pursuit of material wealth abroad, but of the amalgam of European attitudes to Africa. As such, the text is important in tracing the development of Conrad's attitudes in the time leading up to the production of *Heart of Darkness*.

Both Kayerts and Carlier are functionaries and, as such, are removed from the over-arching debate relating to the morality of nation's exploitation of nation. However, they represent the Everyman figure, the individual who when faced with impossible moral choices, acts and then seeks to justify his actions by reference to statements which stress the necessity of following orders. Conrad's awareness of the situation in the Congo in the last few years of the nineteenth century underpins this text and goes some way to providing a justification for the argument that he was disgusted by the treatment meted out by Europeans to Africans.

Moreover, Conrad experienced extreme responses to his employment in the Congo as an extract from a letter he wrote from Kinshasa to his aunt, Marguerite Poradowska, illustrates:

Everything here is repellent to me. Men and things, but men above all. And I am repellent to them, also. From the manager in Africa who has taken the trouble to tell one and all that I offend him supremely, down to the lowest mechanic, they all have the gift of irritating my nerves - so that I am not as agreeable to them perhaps as I should be. The manager is a common ivory dealer with base instincts who considers himself a merchant although he is only a kind of African shop-keeper. His name is Delcommune. He detests the English, and out here I am naturally regarded as such. I cannot hope for either promotion or salary increases while he is here. Besides he has said that promises made in Europe carry no weight here if they are not in the contract. Those made to me by M. Wauters are not. In addition, I cannot look forward to anything because I don't have a ship to command. The new boat will not be completed until June of next year, perhaps. Meanwhile, my position here is unclear and I am troubled by that. So there you are! As crowning joy, my health is far from good. *Keep it a secret for me* [Conrad's italics] - but the truth is that in going up the river I suffered from fever four times in two months, and then at the Falls (which is its home territory), I suffered an attack of dysentery lasting five days. I feel somewhat weak physically and not a little demoralized; and then, really, I believe that I feel home-sick for the sea, the desire to look again on the level expanse of salt-water which has so often lulled me, which has smiled at me so frequently under the sparkling sunshine of a lovely day, which many times too has hurled the threat of death in my face with a swirl of white foam whipped by the wind under the dark December sky. I regret all that. But what I regret even more is having tied myself down for three years. The truth is that it is scarcely probable I shall see them through. Either someone in authority will pick a groundless quarrel in order to send me back (and, really, I sometimes find myself wishing for it), or I shall be sent back to Europe by a new attack of dysentery, unless it consigns me to the other world, which would be a final solution to all my distress.¹¹

Conrad's disillusionment is manifestly clear here and it finds its outlet in the fiction through his characterisation of Kayerts and Carlier which is imbued with the same sense of pessimistic dissatisfaction: there is also a sense of paradox, however. Conrad, even while appearing to adopt an anti-imperialist stance, never quite manages to acknowledge that there may be such an entity as African history, a fact which lies at the centre of Achebe's objection in his essay on *Heart of Darkness*. It is interesting to note that in 'An Outpost of Progress' a similar dislocation occurs between

the 'history' of Kayerts and Carlier and that of Makola. Conrad is unable to locate Makola in an equitable narrative relationship to the Belgians.

Stevenson had a similar difficulty, with the important exception of Uma, in 'The Beach of Falesá'. Both writers are products of the prevailing attitudes which identify dominant and subordinate races, and both seem incapable of any response other than a confused humanism in relation to specific examples, in Stevenson's case, Uma and in Conrad's, Kayerts and Carlier. The portrayal of ill treatment has undertones of an almost Dickensian capacity to identify and empathise with the individual misfortune while, simultaneously, being apparently unaware of the underlying structural cause.

Kayerts and Carlier have one reason for being in the Congo and that is personal gain: there is no evidence of beneficent influence, there is only a determined exploitation of the country and its material wealth. Conrad identifies this process and more especially Kayerts and Carlier's response to it, as essentially corruptive and destructive. Even the most modest projects they undertake collapse because of indolence and bickering, symptoms of declining standards and the lack of discipline suggests itself as an essential characteristic of colonial enterprise. Conrad describes the accommodation used by Kayerts and Carlier in terms which support the impression of decline:

Besides the store-house and Makola's hut, there was only one large building in the cleared ground of the station. It was neatly built of reeds, with a verandah on all the four sides. There were three rooms in it. The one in the middle was the living-room, and had two rough tables and a few stools in it. The other two were the bedrooms for the white men. Each had a bedstead and a mosquito net for all furniture. The plank floor was littered with the belongings of the white men; open half-empty boxes, town wearing apparel, old boots; all the things dirty, and all the things broken, that accumulate mysteriously round untidy men. [OoP, 83]

There is nothing here of the ‘noble’ cause, of the ‘civilising’ process referred to by Leopold in his aforementioned pronouncement of 1898. Bongie highlights this particular issue in his essay ‘A Man of the Last Hour’:

For Conrad, as he makes clear in ‘An Outpost of Progress’ (written after *Outcast of the Islands* and before ‘The Lagoon’), the herd mentality of this modern, essentially urban crowd is identical to that governing the new colonial subject.

With its biting and omniscient narratorial voice, a voice not yet marked by the nostalgia pervading *Heart of Darkness*, ‘An Outpost of Progress’ represents Conrad’s most direct literary attack against the New Imperialism and the impoverished minds that serve it. [Roberts, 139-40]

‘An Outpost of Progress’ represents an important contribution to the literature of dissension from the values of imperialism and makes a key statement regarding the shifting of responsibilities from the individual to the company or, ultimately, to the state. The text prefigures the emergent mass society of the modern period and foregrounds the commodification of its drones, the heirs of Kayerts and Carlier.

The resemblance between the description of Kayerts and Carlier’s quarters and the scene Stevenson depicts in Randall’s trading-post in ‘The Beach of Falesá’ is striking. The scene is emblematic of the ‘going native’ process so feared by the late-Victorian readership. Such fictional appeal to the prevailing concerns of the day is not only about addressing the demands of popular culture: there is a deep-seated anxiety on the part of the author that establishes a literary symbiosis that extends beyond simply commercial considerations. Both Conrad and Stevenson are feeding the very neurosis that allegedly wishes to deny the capacity of colonial rulers, or at least their representatives, to descend into atavistic regression. The

fascination of the degenerative process as it relates to notions of simultaneous reverse colonisation is, for a *fin-de-siecle* readership, difficult to overstate. In the foregoing passage, Conrad uses the breakdown of conventional domestic arrangements to indicate something altogether more sinister and indicative of the accelerating downward spiral. The patina of civilisation is merely that, as observed by Lumley in John Buchan's *The Power House*: 'You think that a wall as solid as the earth separates civilisation from barbarism. I tell you that the division is a thread, a sheet of glass.'¹²

Conrad has in mind a racial absolute: a character utterly reliable and often, in Conrad's case, an officer of the mercantile marine. Such an individual is invariably 'fit', not simply in the sense of physical prowess, although such a characteristic would comply with the stereotype, but in the sense of worthiness and solidity in the presence of danger or setback. Neither Kayerts or Carlier is 'fit', in the context of this usage, for the business each is embarked upon, instead they look back to Europe by means of books and out-dated journals in order to establish, in their own minds, a sense of worth, a sense which reinforces their prejudices:

The two men understood nothing, cared for nothing but for the passage of days that separated them from the steamer's return. Their predecessor had left some torn books. They took up these wrecks of novels, and, as they had never read anything of the kind before, they were surprised and amused. Then during long days there were interminable and silly discussions about plots and personages. In the centre of Africa they made acquaintance of Richelieu and of D'Artagnan, of Hawk's Eye and of Father Goriot, and of many other people. All these imaginary personages became subjects for gossip as if they had been living friends. They discounted their virtues, suspected their motives, decried their successes; were scandalised at their duplicity or were doubtful about their courage. The accounts of crimes filled them with indignation, while tender or pathetic passages moved them deeply. Carlier cleared his throat and said in a soldierly voice, 'What nonsense!' Kayerts, his round eyes suffused with tears, his fat cheeks quivering, rubbed his bald head, and declared, 'This is a splendid book. I had no idea there were

such clever fellows in the world.' They also found some old copies of a home paper. That print discussed what it was pleased to call 'Our Colonial Expansion' in high-flown language. It spoke much of the rights and duties of civilisation, of the sacredness of the civilising work, and extolled the merits of those who went about bringing light, and faith and commerce to the dark places of the earth. Carlier and Kayerts read, wondered, and began to think better of themselves. [OoP, 90]

The emphasis on European culture, whether furnished by 'wrecks of novels' or by journalism, enables both Kayerts and Carlier to dismiss any doubts about their adequacy for the task in hand. It also illustrates, in that brief interlude, the ease with which some men are persuaded to a sense of righteousness and a belief in the justice of their actions in an example of the 'herd mentality' referred to by Bongie. Furthermore, the foregoing passage illustrates the gap between the ideals of the Empire's grand narrative and the reality on the ground. The striking element in all of this is not simply the delusional element manifested by both Kayerts and Carlier but its underlying significance. Conrad does show the weakness of both men and their capacity for self-deception is equated to their unworthiness. What is perhaps more important, however, is that they regard themselves as members of the hegemonic elite. It is the irony of this perception which has the most potent influence with regard to how they are regarded by the reader seeking to establish 'An Outpost of Progress' as an anti-imperialist text. Significant also is the fact that Kayerts and Carlier assume their superiority vicariously, that is to say it is not based on their own efforts but on literary approbation for a European racial paradigm. Both Kayerts and Carlier can be identified with the same self-delusional characteristic of Almayer and Willems and it results in their lack of realism in respect of their relative ambitions.

Conrad suggests that realistic self-awareness is a central component of an individual fit to occupy a position of responsibility and it is significant that neither of the aforementioned characters displays such an attribute. The escape into self-delusion is a weakness in Conrad's terms and the effect of portraying Kayerts and Carlier as believers in their own heroism only increases the ironical element of the text. There is a point at which self-delusion overtakes reality and both characters are complacent in their conviction that their destiny is the achievement of nobility through the assumption of the 'white man's burden'. The result of Kayerts and Carlier's absorption in fiction is ignorance of the realities going on around them. This can be seen most emphatically when Makola exchanges the trading-post workers for ivory in an arrangement with another tribe from the coast. In this trade-off Kayerts and Carlier are implicated as slavers and require to extend the fiction in order to explain the disappearance of the workforce to the managing director on his next visit:

They had long ago reckoned their percentages on trade, including in them that last deal of 'this infamous Makola'. They had also concluded not to say anything about it. Kayerts hesitated at first - was afraid of the Director.

'He has seen worse things done on the quiet,' maintained Carlier, with a hoarse laugh. 'Trust him! He won't thank you if you blab. He is no better than you or me. Who will talk if we hold our tongues? There is nobody here.'

That was the root of the trouble! There was nobody there; and being left there alone with their weakness, they became daily more like a pair of accomplices than like a couple of devoted friends. They had heard nothing from home for eight months. Every evening they said, 'Tomorrow we shall see the steamer.' But one of the Company's steamers had been wrecked, and the Director was busy with the other, relieving very distant and important stations on the main river. He thought that the useless station, and the useless men, could wait.' [OoP, 102-3]

The outcome of Kayerts and Carlier's efforts on behalf of 'progress' is thoroughly negative and highly ironic: they have made an already awful situation worse by their ineptitude and lack of care. The impact of this text

on its audience was very similar to that of Stevenson's 'The Beach of Falesá': it brought the reality of Empire into Victorian parlours and subverted the popular view of a benevolent European presence in Africa dedicated to the enlightenment of the so-called 'dark races'. The inter-connection of Stevenson and Conrad in this respect is important since at least one critic has suggested that Conrad ought to be regarded as a privileged commentator on the effects of imperialism:

Indeed, Conrad's whole perspective on imperialism differed fundamentally from that of other English authors of his time and provided him with a uniquely broad view of the issues. Alone among writers like Kipling, Haggard, Henley, and Stevenson, Conrad lived both as a native of a colonized country and as a member of a colonizing community.¹³

The reality of their situation does eventually dawn on Kayerts and Carlier and that awareness brings about a swift deterioration in them: their tragic end is brought about by an incident that borders on the farcical:

One day after a lunch of boiled rice, Carlier put down his cup untasted, and said: 'Hang it all! Let's have a decent cup of coffee for once. Bring out that sugar, Kayerts!'

'For the sick,' muttered Kayerts, without looking up.

'For the sick,' mocked Carlier. 'Bosh!... Well! I am sick.'

'You are no more sick than I am, and I go without,' said Kayerts in a peaceful tone.

'Come! Out with that sugar, you stingy old slave-dealer.'

Kayerts looked up quickly. Carlier was smiling with marked insolence. And suddenly it seemed to Kayerts that he had never seen that man before. Who was he? He knew nothing about him. What was he capable of? There was a surprising flash of violent emotion within him, as if in the presence of something undreamt-of, dangerous, and final. [OoP, 103-4]

The following exchange of insults and a ludicrous chase around the bungalow once again figures the apparently farcical, but the consequences are simultaneously absurd, dramatic, and tragic. Cornered in the house by Carlier, Kayerts grabs his revolver and shoots blindly, killing his partner. Kayerts's initial shock is overtaken by a rationalisation that is central to the thematic structure of the text:

Night came, and Kayerts sat unmoving on his chair. He sat quiet as if he had taken a dose of opium. The violence of the emotions he had passed through produced a feeling of exhausted serenity. He had plumbed in one short afternoon the depths of horror and despair, and now found repose in the conviction that life had no more secrets for him: neither had death! He sat by the corpse thinking; thinking very actively, thinking very new thoughts. He seemed to have broken loose from himself altogether. His old thoughts, convictions, likes and dislikes, things he respected and things he abhorred, appeared in their true light at last! Appeared contemptible and childish, false and ridiculous. He revelled in his new wisdom while he sat by the man he had killed. He argued with himself about all the things under heaven with that kind of wrong-headed lucidity which may be observed in some lunatics. Incidentally he reflected that the fellow dead there had been a noxious beast anyway; that men died every day in thousands; perhaps in hundreds of thousands - who could tell? - and that in the number, that one death couldn't possibly make any difference; have any importance, at least to a thinking creature. [OoP, 107-8]

Kayerts appears to have rationalised a solution to his murder of Carlier but daylight brings the realisation of the enormity of his actions and the effect is apocalyptic:

A shriek inhuman, vibrating and sudden, pierced like a sharp dart the white shroud of that land of sorrow. Three short, impatient screeches followed, and then, for a time, the fog-wreaths rolled on, undisturbed, through a formidable silence. Then many more shrieks, rapid and piercing, like the yells of some exasperated and ruthless creature, rent the air. Progress was calling to Kayerts from the river. Progress and civilization and all the virtues. Society was calling to its accomplished child to come, to be taken care of, to be instructed, to be judged, to be condemned; it called to him to return to that rubbish heap from which he had wandered away, so that justice could be done.

Kayerts heard and understood. He stumbled out of the verandah, leaving the other man quite alone for the first time since they had been thrown there together. He groped his way through the fog, calling in his ignorance upon the invisible heaven to undo its work. Makola flitted by in the mist, shouting as he ran -

'Steamer! Steamer! They can't see. They whistle for the station. I go ring the bell. Go down to the landing, sir. I ring.'

He disappeared. Kayerts stood still. He looked upwards; the fog rolled low over his head. He looked round like a man who has lost his way; and he saw a dark smudge, a cross-shaped stain, upon the shifting purity of the mist. As he began to stumble towards it, the station bell rang in a tumultuous peal its answer to the impatient clamour of the steamer. [OoP, 108-9]

The fore-grounding of the African landscape in this passage is embedded with significance. The imagery of Africa, wrapped in fog, and consequently obscured from the Western gaze, is characterized by

‘formidable silence’ that evokes a powerful sense of alienation. The ambiguity that will characterize much of *Heart of Darkness* is in evidence in ‘An Outpost of Progress’ and that feature is associated in a fundamental sense with the imagery of the African landscape.

Conrad develops a climactic ending: in the midst of the clamour surrounding the steamer’s arrival, Kayerts commits suicide by hanging himself on the cross above the first agent’s grave:

He had evidently climbed the grave, which was high and narrow, and after tying the end of the strap to the arm, had swung himself off. His toes were only a couple of inches above the ground; his arms hung stiffly down; he seemed to be standing rigidly at attention, but with one purple cheek playfully posed on the shoulder. And, irreverently, he was putting out a swollen tongue at his Managing Director. [OoP, 110]

Conrad undercuts the tragic nature of the concluding scene by the final image of Kayerts’s apparent irreverence but the re-emergence of the cross device is significant. The symbolism of the cross is emphasised again: Conrad returns to the central emblem of Christianity and hangs upon this cross, located in the African interior, a representative of Western capitalism. It is Kayerts, not the Managing Director of the ‘Great Civilizing Company’ who hangs for his sins. The message is clear: the small men pay the price, their substitution absolves the truly guilty in a bitterly ironic twist to the Christian myth. Conrad would appear to be suggesting, as Stevenson had done in the ‘born-again’ conversion of Davis in *The Ebb Tide*, that Christianity’s power to enlighten is not sufficient to neutralise humankind’s greed, especially in relation to colonial exploitation. This must have been a particularly revelatory insight as far as Stevenson was concerned, bred upon a diet of fundamentalist

Scottish Presbyterianism. Conrad's apprehension of this phenomenon is no less striking.

It may be argued that in 'An Outpost of Progress', Conrad deals with the issue of imperialism with much less obfuscation than he does in the more critically acclaimed *Heart of Darkness*. The symbolic representations in 'An Outpost of Progress' are more obvious than in the densely packed imagery and symbolism of *Heart of Darkness*. However, it is likely that Conrad re-figured his methodology when he came to write *Heart of Darkness* in response to negative comments about 'An Outpost of Progress'. Critical appraisal of 'An Outpost of Progress' must inevitably, it may be argued, make reference to *Heart of Darkness* and comparison, often negative in import, appears to be equally inevitable. The Conrad scholar, Frederick Karl offers this appraisal of the story in a commentary on *Tales of Unrest* (1898):

A third story, "An Outpost of Progress" was described by Conrad as "the lightest part of the loot carried off from Central Africa," and it suffers from inevitable comparison with "Heart of Darkness." The ironic tone of the story – an irony implicit in the title – is conveyed through widespread use of images, but the images are invariable and of a uniformity which forces the obvious. The scenic desolation is all there: the smudged and broken equipment, the empty useless boxes, the torn wearing apparel, and the spiritually exhausted colonists. But the manner and meaning of the story are rarely more than its physical equipment.¹⁴

It is central to the substance of the present chapter that 'An Outpost of Progress' should be associated with the core elements of *Heart of Darkness* rather than being distinguished from them. It is the *symbolic* values that form the linkage to *Heart of Darkness* and these relate to the African landscape in part. Important elements of the symbolic patterning may also be seen in the representations of the characters: their 'torn

wearing apparel' associates them in at least one reader's mind with the wreckage of Captain Billy Randall in his own 'Outpost of Progress' at Falesá.

The late-nineteenth-century novel may be said to preclude the colonial Other and deny him or her a 'history' for reasons that are obvious. Equally, it may be argued that the same, Imperial discourse limits opportunities for the development of characters from lowly origins in a social mirroring of the racial prejudice which is central to the underlying assumptions challenged by Stevenson and Conrad. The characters perceived to deteriorate do not have far to fall.

As stated in the introduction to this chapter, the volume of criticism generated by *Heart of Darkness* is immense and the text is included in this thesis both to illustrate its significance in a body of anti-imperialist writing and to demonstrate its adoption of forms associated with literary modernism.

In considering *Heart of Darkness*, it will be argued that the 'histories' contained within the text are subjective and Conrad's reading of events in the Congo are themselves not only subjective, but, they are biased in favour of a Eurocentric interpretation. It will be argued in discussion of *Heart of Darkness* that one function of literature may be to dramatise events or processes in such a way as to create dissonance between rival voices in the narrative. That is to say, there is no one world-view that is valid *per se*, rather there are many such views which compete for consideration, success being predicated upon the hegemonic balance existing between the competing discourses. It may be suggested that

hegemony alone will dictate which discourse will prevail in any given epoch: these considerations will form the ground for an analysis of *Heart of Darkness*.

Published in *Youth: A Narrative, and Two Other Stories*¹⁶ (1902), *Heart of Darkness* received less critical attention than the title text, but since then the novella has been the focus of intensive analysis. The purpose of the present discussion is to show how Conrad and Stevenson develop the adventure fiction of the late-nineteenth century into a critical appraisal of imperialist hegemony. Both Stevenson and Conrad base their 'adventure' writing, to use the description of the time, upon contemporary geopolitical developments. These relate in the main to colonial expansion, but to apply the term 'adventure' writing is both inaccurate and misleading. Only the exotic locations relate the genre to 'adventure' in anything other than the most superficial sense. These texts are attempts to arrive at an understanding of hugely significant events and processes on the lives of the *apparatchiks* caught up in them. They do not address the African, or Samoan, experience and any attempt to claim that they do would be based on a desire to make a theory fit anachronistically. The critic may wish things to have been different, but it would be disingenuous to write as if the value systems which are legitimised in the post-colonial world were prevalent at the end of the nineteenth century. However difficult it is to justify in terms of contemporary belief systems, both Stevenson and Conrad were attempting to draw attention to the injustices of colonialism while at the same time being part of them. This point illustrates the argument, central to the present discussion, that

Stevenson and Conrad are placed side-by-side on Jameson's 'fault line' in this very important respect. It is therefore to misunderstand the cultural climate of the times to imagine that either writer could have written the African or Samoan 'history' or experience that critics have desired. The prevailing cultural hegemony was based upon the racist assumption of European superiority and so the only response to things African is linked to 'Otherness' and the element of threat. John Brannigan has remarked:

Africa is also experienced by European colonial discourse as the site of European nightmare, as the embodiment of a European unconsciousness or anti-self. If Europe's encounter with the new world in the sixteenth century was represented as a source of wonder and marvel, the encounter with Africa as 'other' within the European self was represented as a source of dread and horror.¹⁷

The citation, at least in part, underpins the approach to Conrad favoured in this chapter: there is none of the excitement of the Renaissance explorer in Conrad's Africa, but there is another important element. The suggestion is that these texts tell the reader more about Europe in the period of imperial expansion and, on another level, it is clearly a function of the text to shed light on the underlying anxieties of European man's primitive past. Even more significant, perhaps, is the extent to which this Western anxiety comes to be projected onto the modern African subject. Because of the privileged status of the European, it became possible to off-load anxieties such as the fear of reverse colonisation, for example, and re-construct them in the 'marginal' characters. It becomes a matter then of seeing the African as a representation of the deep-seated concerns of the European dislocated, in spatial terms, from the comforts of home. Moreover, it may be suggested

that the African becomes the projection of the European's shadow self: a representation of the atavistic, Hyde-figure.

The point may be reinforced by viewing it from another perspective: Marlow is engaged in attempting to forget Kurtz when he is safely back in London, as he tries to throw off the "horror" of his experiences. Foucault uses the term 'counter-memory' to describe the disturbing flashback which subverts the European attempt to rewrite actual experience in a favourable light. This phenomenon seems to pervade the work of Stevenson in the Samoan years and resonates throughout 'An Outpost of Progress' and *Heart of Darkness*¹⁸.

In the opening paragraph of *Heart of Darkness*, the cruising yawl *Nellie*, literally the platform for Marlow's tale, is at anchor in the Thames and so it appears that the content of what follows is set in a far-distant country, removed from the capital of the British Empire. However, it might be argued that Conrad's ironic view of colonialism allows the 'heart of darkness' to be located not in the upper reaches of the Belgian Congo, but at the 'heart' of Empire, that is to say, in the capital of the most powerful nation on earth. From this 'heart' the huge artery of the Thames flows eventually into that artery situated upon the coast of the continent of Africa, and the out-flowing is not life-giving but rather the opposite: it is tainted and corruptive.

Even Conrad's most reliable figure, the seafarer, is re-figured in the opening paragraphs:

The Director of Companies was our Captain and our host. We four affectionately watched his back as he stood in the bows looking to seaward. On the whole river there was nothing that looked half so nautical. He resembled a pilot which to a seaman is trustworthiness personified. *It was*

*difficult to realise his work was not out there in the luminous estuary, but behind him, within the brooding gloom.*¹⁹ (my italics)

The association of a seafarer with the 'brooding gloom' may be read to support the theory that Conrad finds the root of the problem located in the commercial centre of London to the *west* of the vessel's location. That commercialism should compromise a character with whom Conrad would share an understandable sense of brotherhood and empathy is, arguably, the beginning of a series of events which involves the under-cutting of individuals engaged in the business of trade in Africa. The corruption emanates from London and the city is figured as a paradigm for other European capitals similarly occupied with exploitative dealing. The corruption, Conrad suggests, finds its apogee in the inner stations of the continents laid open to Western imperialism.

Heart of Darkness is a novel of exploitation and the sole reason for Kurtz's presence in Africa is the acquisition of wealth, not the enlightenment or civilisation of the population. The brutality with which the trade is carried on supports the theory of the European projection of barbarism onto the indigenous population, which is not to exonerate or deny African barbarity where it occurs, but rather to emphasise the earlier assertion regarding Foucauldian 'counter-memory'. This makes it difficult, if not impossible, for Conrad to view the colonial process from any perspective other than that of the coloniser. Whenever a European writer of the period addresses the issue he necessarily does so from the stand-point of a representative of Empire, whether or not he espouses a jingoistic attitude towards the populations of foreign countries. The underlying reason for Achebe's criticism of *Heart of Darkness* is obvious,

but it is more complex than objecting to the use of pejorative terminology. Perhaps it was never going to be possible for Conrad to create a black African character who was not simply the projection of white anxieties. That is to say, the Other informs the colonial subject by showing the *coloniser's* attitude, whatever that attitude may be: one of fear, or benign paternalism.

Central to the descriptions of European and black African characters is a symbolism that can similarly be discerned in that most modern work of Stevenson, *The Ebb Tide*. Both *The Ebb Tide* and *Heart of Darkness* emphasise the importance of voyage, beginning as a quest, developing into a nightmare and concluding with a return to the point of departure where the experiences are filtered through a memory which attempts to throw off Foucauldian 'counter-memory', but fails. The process by which this takes place is closely related to structure and to a reliance on symbolism, and in the extent to which the structure expands the meaning. *Heart of Darkness* utilises the components of a Modernist text. Of central importance is the role of the narrator(s) especially as questions of individual psychology and consciousness are raised: these are core concerns of the Modernist novel and both Stevenson and Conrad can be seen to experiment with narratorial devices. The undermining of established value systems is, it may be argued, an issue at the heart of Modernism. Given that Marlow's audience is made up of representatives of the Establishment, the Director of Companies, the Accountant and the Lawyer, it may be posited that his narrative is particularly disruptive of the complacency the Establishment may be said to typify.

At this juncture, rather than undertaking a line-by-line interrogation of the text, several key episodes which occur will be discussed in relation to the themes already raised and some specific conclusions will be drawn.

Marlow's narration begins with a statement that locates the primitive in Ancient Britain. This happens in one line that temporarily breaks the flow of the first narrative voice, and the structure of the passage requires analysis:

His remark did not seem at all surprising. It was just like Marlow. It was accepted in silence. No one took the trouble to grunt even, and presently he said very slow:

'I was thinking of very old times, when the Romans first came here, nineteen hundred years ago - the other day...Light came out of this river since - you say Knights? Yes, but it is like a running blaze on a plain, like a flash of lightning in the clouds. We live in the flicker - may it last as long as the old earth keeps rolling! But darkness was here yesterday. Imagine the feelings of a commander of a fine - what d'ye call 'em - trireme in the Mediterranean, ordered suddenly to the north; run overland across the Gauls in a hurry; put in charge of one of these craft the legionaries - a wonderful lot of handy men they must have been too - used to build, apparently by the hundred, in a month or two, if we may believe what we read. Imagine him here - the very end of the world, a sea the colour of lead, a sky the colour of smoke, a kind of ship about as rigid as a concertina - and going up this river with stores or orders, or what you like. Sandbanks, marshes, forests, savages, precious little to eat fit for a civilised man, nothing but Thames water to drink.' [...] 'March through the woods, and in some inland post feel the savagery. The utter savagery had closed round him - all that mysterious life of the wilderness that stirs in the forest, in the jungles, in the hearts of wild men. There's no initiation either into such mysteries. He has to live in the midst of the incomprehensible which is also detestable. And it has a fascination too, that goes to work upon him. The fascination of the abomination - you know. Imagine the growing regrets, the longing to escape, the powerless disgust, the surrender - the hate.' [HoD, 9-10]

The dense symbolism and its linear relationship to what will follow in Marlow's narrative requires further elucidation, and in particular as it connects with ideas of power and the process of the corruptive nature of power in *Heart of Darkness*. Furthermore, it will be necessary to show how this text manages to express its meaning using proto-Modernist narrative techniques. Significantly, in the foregoing passage, the African

is again represented as an integral component of the primeval landscape, a recurring trope in Conrad's 'African' fiction. Stevenson's *The Ebb Tide* uses an image, that of the lagoon, which suggests light as something other than the conventional symbol of the good and wholesome. The light is intense and causes blindness rather than clear vision: the description resonates with the imagery of Yeats in 'The Second Coming' in which he refers to the Sphinx's 'gaze as blank and pitiless as the sun.'²⁰ Light of this quality paradoxically obfuscates: in *Heart of Darkness*, Conrad uses light symbolism in a very similar manner to Stevenson and the reader is aware of this subversion of conventional symbolic significance very early in the text. The effect here is to invert one of the basic symbols of Western Christian civilisation: the Light of the World. The use of such symbolic devices is associated with literary Modernism, and the search for a method within which to address difficult issues locates Stevenson and Conrad on the threshold of that movement. The generalised employment of symbolism is associated with the High Modernist period, but here, in the work of Stevenson, Conrad and Yeats, evidence can be seen of the adoption of symbolism in the proto-Modernist text. Put simply, light is darkness and, thereafter, nothing that depends on the evidence of one's eyes can be trusted. The symbolic values Yeats applies are similar to those of both Stevenson and Conrad in that they focus on antithesis and opposition, and particularly on the inauguration of a subjective age characterised by arrogance and violence. Yeats, modernist and, according to some critics, prophet of the dictatorial systems which would plunge Europe into darkness in the 1930s, may have looked back to the

symbolism of the proto-Modernist writers of the *fin-de-siècle* for the light symbolism of 'The Second Coming'. In any event Stevenson and Conrad have re-figured 'light' in response to the influence of coloniser upon the colonised. The light symbolism of *Heart of Darkness* lies at the basal interface of relationships between the whites and Africans, and it contrasts modernity and primitivism. However, there are at least two possible readings: firstly, to be modern is not to be savage; secondly, modernity is no *cordon sanitaire* against savagery, as evidenced by the behaviour of the colonising whites. The projection of the western image of the savage is turned back on itself in this literary device, effectively and disturbingly. This is done in a way that evokes the central concerns of the Modernist text, the de-stabilising of certitude and the subversion of conventional linear narrative. *Heart of Darkness* embodies the Modernist tropes of uncertainty and complexity by using a methodology similar to that of Stevenson's in *The Ebb Tide*, in a process that involves both writers moving beyond the perspective of nineteenth-century realism.

By referring to a seafarer of a bygone era, a Roman, Conrad links the fraternal brotherhood of mariners across epistemic breaks, arguing for an unknowable bond, the alchemical quality of which is familiar only to its initiates. The connection to Stevenson's notion that people are the same wherever one may find them seems strong in this particular context. The reference to the ordinary sailor as representative of the great empire is indicative also of the importance of sea power in the acquisition and protection of such empires: a realisation based on experience as far as it concerned Conrad. It is also a means of highlighting the first-hand nature

of the experiences that drive the fictions of Stevenson and Conrad. The Roman seafarer shares the same difficulties faced by the white man in Africa even down to the infestations of insects and diseases, in an ironic subversion of 'Great' Britain at the height of her imperial expansion. Conrad seems to point to the futility of colonialism and its inherent unpleasantness for coloniser and colonised in a further ironic undercutting of a process that was gross and barbaric. However euphemistic Conrad might be in his description of conditions facing the Roman legionaries in Britain, he is writing for a British reader and a reader likely to be supportive of British colonial ambition in the main. That he nevertheless chooses to expose the tyranny of colonialism however obliquely at this point in the narrative, Conrad suggests that there is worse to come. It is suggested that the Romans' treatment of Britons is nothing as compared to the white man's treatment of Africans. This further substantiates the idea that the contemporary British reader can only understand 'Otherness' when it is related to his own contextual framework.

In an insight into Conrad's awareness of the emerging pseudo-scientific processes linked to Modernist preoccupations with personality classification as pioneered by Cesare Lombroso, Marlow undergoes a medical examination before his voyage to the Congo:

'The old doctor felt my pulse, evidently thinking of something else the while. 'Good! Good for there,' he mumbled, and then with a certain eagerness asked me whether I would let him measure my head. Rather surprised, I said Yes, when he produced a thing like callipers and got the dimensions back and front and every way, taking notes carefully. He was an unshaven little man in a thread-bare coat like a gaberdine with his feet in slippers, and I thought him a harmless fool. 'I always ask leave, in the interests of science, to measure the crania of those going out there,' he said. 'And when they come back too?' I asked. 'Oh, I never see them,' he remarked, 'and, moreover the changes take place inside, you know.' He smiled as if at some quiet joke. 'So you are going out there. Famous. Interesting too.' He gave me a searching glance and

made another note. 'Ever any madness in your family?' he asked in a matter-of-fact tone. I felt very annoyed. 'Is that question in the interests of science too?' 'It would be,' he said without taking notice of my irritation, 'interesting for science to watch the mental changes of individuals on the spot, but...' 'Are you an alienist?'²¹ I interrupted. 'Every doctor should be - a little,' answered that original imperturbably. 'I have a little theory which you Messieurs who go out there must help me to prove. This is my share in the advantages my country shall reap from the possession of such a magnificent dependency. The mere wealth I leave to others. Pardon my questions, but you are the first Englishman coming under my observation...' I hastened to assure him I was not in the least typical. 'If I were,' said I, 'I wouldn't be talking like this with you.' 'What you say is rather profound and probably erroneous,' he said with a laugh. 'Avoid irritation more than exposure to the sun. Adieu. How do you English say, eh? Good-bye. Ah! Goodbye. Adieu. In the tropics one must before everything keep calm.'...He lifted a warning finger... '*Du calme, du calme. Adieu.*' [HoD, 15]

Conrad outlines several interesting ideas in this passage and importantly, he locates the African experience 'out there'. The doctor's repetition of this phrase emphasises the 'Otherness' of the African: the phrase has the quality of the implied threat that awaits the unwary Englishman. The device that creates the effect of distancing is contained in the tonal quality of ironic detachment Conrad achieves throughout *Heart of Darkness* and which also gives it a modernist texture. Ironic detachment as a literary trope reflects the actual distancing of two cultural discourses: the white colonist cannot relate to the colonised other except by way of a projected image. This makes secure the inevitability of an 'imperialist' portrayal of the African subject. Edward Said outlines the nature of the difficulty in *Culture and Imperialism*²²:

Conrad could probably never have used Marlow to present anything other than an imperialist world-view, given what was available for either Conrad or Marlow to see of the non-European at the time. Independence was for whites and Europeans; the lesser or subject peoples were to be ruled; science, learning, history emanated from the West. True, Conrad scrupulously recorded the differences between Belgian and British colonial attitudes, but he could only imagine the world carved up into one or another Western sphere of dominion.

However, Said goes on to make an observation which may be significant both in respect of Conrad's output, and in terms of Stevenson's literary output also:

Conrad's realization is that if, like narrative, imperialism has monopolized the entire system of representation – which in the case of *Heart of Darkness* allowed it to speak for Africans as well as for Kurtz and the other adventurers, including Marlow and his audience – your self-consciousness as an outsider can allow you actively to comprehend how the machine works, given that you and it are fundamentally not on perfect synchrony or correspondence. [C I, 27]

Conrad's representation of the African is of its time and is based upon assumptions which may be anathema to liberal, late twentieth-, early twenty-first century academics. However, it is impossible to take Conrad, or indeed Stevenson, out of the late nineteenth century and attempt to represent them as present day egalitarians: such an attempt is both illogically anachronistic and dishonest. The focal plane from which Conrad views the action of *Heart of Darkness* primarily foregrounds white, European figures but it is interesting to note that Conrad, perhaps mirroring Stevenson's description of Uma, is also fascinated by the exotic, challenging female figure:

'She walked with measured steps, draped in striped and fringed cloths, treading the earth proudly with a slight jingle and flash of barbarous ornaments. She carried her head high, her hair was done in the shape of a helmet, she had brass leggings to the knees, brass wire gauntlets to the elbow, a crimson spot on her tawny cheek, innumerable necklaces of glass beads on her neck, bizarre things, charms, gifts of witch-men, that hung about her, glittered and trembled at every step. She must have had the value of several elephant tusks about her. She was savage and superb, wild-eyed and magnificent; there was something ominous and stately in her deliberate progress. And in the hush that had fallen suddenly upon the whole sorrowful land, the immense wilderness, the colossal body of the fecund and mysterious life seemed to look at her, pensive, as though it had been looking at the image of its own tenebrous and passionate soul.

'She came abreast of the steamer, stood still, and faced us. Her long shadow fell to the water's edge. Her face had a tragic and fierce aspect of wild sorrow and dumb pain mingled with the fear of some struggling, half-shaped resolve. She stood looking at us without a stir and like the wilderness

itself, with an air of brooding over an inscrutable purpose. A whole minute passed and then she made a step forward. There was a low jingle, a glint of yellow metal, a sway of fringed draperies, and she stopped as if her heart had failed her. The young fellow by my side growled. The pilgrims murmured at my back. She looked at us all as if her life had depended upon the unswerving steadiness of her glance. Suddenly she opened her bared arms and threw them up rigid above her head as though in an uncontrollable desire to touch the sky, and at the same time the swift shadows darted out on the earth, swept around on the river, gathering the steamer in a shadowy embrace. A formidable silence hung over the scene.

[HoD, 60-61]

The eroticization of the female figure is hugely significant: she is at once attractive and desirable but she can never be completely subjugated. As a metaphor for Africa, this figure is equally hard to resist. As a metaphor for Africa, she is a magnificent symbol emerging from the African landscape and fading back into it, but she is not a credible human being with human problems and projects. This is vitally important in the context of the present study because it suggests that in this respect, Stevenson goes beyond Conrad by taking the first steps towards hearing the voice of the colonial Other as the voice of a fellow human being. That would constitute a highly significant departure from the norms of behaviour of the period. Spurr, in *The Rhetoric of Empire*, cites several examples of such an equation of Africa with the mistress-character:

The allegorization of colonized nations in terms of the female *figure* (bodily, rhetorical) has been a cliché of colonial history. Jean Lorrain's *Heures d'Afrique* (1899) describes Algeria as "a cunning and dangerous mistress," who distills "a climate that envelops with caresses and torpor." [RE, 171]

The metaphor is extended into the relationship between the figures of culture and character: the resistant female is foregrounded in both Stevenson and Conrad as the representative of the values of her culture: her seduction can be viewed as the triumph of the coloniser. However, the

fact remains that the strong woman can resist and the male will be forced into a compromised situation in order to keep her. Wiltshire, in the concluding lines of 'The Beach of Falesá', is faced with the outcome of just such a union as Stevenson addresses one of the majors concerns of the age.

Conrad describes the African woman in terms that connect with Stevenson's description of Uma, albeit that Conrad emphasises the threatening image of the woman, while Stevenson concentrates on the qualities which emphasise Uma's tenderness. However, both writers are describing something very different from the paradigm of Victorian domesticity; these exotic women threaten to destabilise the image of subservient spouses as represented in English social life. In an ironic undercutting of the Victorian concern with racial violation through reverse colonisation, both Stevenson and Conrad create *female* characters who share the capacity to ensnare the unwary white trader. One example of an event that helped to create the mind-set which viewed inter-racial contact as unacceptably dangerous was the 'Indian Mutiny' of 1857.

Occurring in the year of Conrad's birth, and when Stevenson was seven years of age, the uprising struck at the core of British complacency. The historian Professor Denis Judd offers this significant statement on the effects of the uprising:

The Indian Rebellion of 1857 inflicted a deep wound upon the Victorian psyche. It was a challenge flung in the face of the comfortable British assumption that sound and efficient administration was enough to keep imperial subjects content, or at least uncomplaining. Because the uprising went beyond the army and involved considerable numbers of Indian civilians, it also provided an uncomfortable reminder that the disenfranchised masses at home might not be bought off in perpetuity by the already outdated constitutional reforms of the 1832 Act or by the wages and full employment apparently guaranteed as part of Britain's manufacturing supremacy. Perhaps

they, too, might rise in revolt against property and privilege and the virtual monopoly of state power.

The rebellion had other, darker resonances. The assault of Indian rebels, particularly the mutinous sepoys of the Army of Bengal, upon sections of the European civil and military population included violence directed at British women and children. *The Kanpur massacre of captive British females and their offspring confirmed some of the worst fantasies of the European imperial imagination. As in the uprisings of black slaves in the Caribbean and North America, the white, male response to the 'uppity nigger' of the Bengal Army was an explosive and lethal mixture of fear and loathing. At the heart of this uncompromising reaction was a horror of the sexual violation of white women by black men. The middle-class Victorian woman had not been placed on a pedestal in order to be flung onto the ground, raped, and then killed by brown heathens. The fact that the Indian rebels of 1857, overwhelmingly, it seems, did not rape their female captives did nothing to alter the conviction that an unspeakable violation had occurred.*²³

(my italics)

Several important issues arise in this extract which assist in framing the argument that both Stevenson and Conrad reverse the concerns of the high Victorian epoch by placing the allegedly inferior woman, the inferior *black* woman at that, in a position of power over the white bourgeois male. The reason both 'The Beach of Falesá' and *Heart of Darkness* met with hostile critical responses relates directly to this subversion of accepted premises regarding inter-racial connections. The treatment of these inter-racial issues is not identical, as has been stated, and it may be speculated that such distinctions were not germane in the period of production. Moreover, Judd correctly highlights the awareness amongst the privileged classes that the essentially superficial reforms carried out by means of the 1832 Act could, at best, offer a palliative response to a problem essentially structural in nature. The British worker, witnessing the 'outrages' against Empire might get ideas, the argument goes: that this argument largely overlooks the embedded assumption amongst the uneducated masses that other races *were* inferior does not materially undermine the sense of rising panic on the part of both colonial and

London-based officialdom. Both Stevenson and Conrad take their fiction into overtly political areas and mount a challenge upon the very bases of imperial assumptions. That both writers go beyond the bogey-man imagery of the sexually rapacious Other is of central importance. Much has been made of the anxieties of the late Victorian era, rightly so, but the emphasis on psychological issues has a tendency to obscure the concern with contemporary *realpolitik* which lay at the core of the anxiety felt by the ruling class. In light of this, both Stevenson and Conrad can be viewed as subversive writers, both in the conventional framework of late Victorian fiction, but also in the extent to which they are prepared to address uncomfortable issues.

Perhaps it is possible for both novelists to be overtly critical of imperialism in a way that, for example, Haggard or Kipling could not be, because of their background in discourses not central to the grand narrative of Empire. Both Scotland and Poland functioned politically and culturally as units of larger, dominant blocs. Something of their early, formative cultural lives would appear to place both Stevenson and Conrad in unusually advantageous positions to comment on the workings of Empire. That said, both writers are bound by certain, almost stereotypical, figures embedded in the Western consciousness during the closing decades of the nineteenth century and this observation is of some importance when considering *Heart of Darkness*.

The figure of the white man 'gone native' is once again of central importance in the fiction of colonialism, as Brantlinger illustrates:

By combining romance and exposé, Conrad creates a brilliantly ironic structure in which the diabolical Kurtz demonstrates how the Dark Continent

grew dark. For Conrad the ultimate atrocity is not some type of tribal savagery but Kurtz's regression.²⁴

Kurtz in *Heart of Darkness* can be read as a prime example of this degenerative process and the wreckage that is Captain Billy Randall, beached at Falesá, is also a recognisable example of the type. The assumptions underlying the European appraisal of exposure to 'natives' is deeply ironic given the levels of exploitation perpetrated by whites against the indigenous populations of Africa and the Pacific, to cite only two examples. It may be argued that Conrad utilises the tone of detached irony to best effect in his portrayal of Kurtz, relayed in a refractive narrative by Marlow, Conrad's 'reliable witness.'

Kurtz is located in a spatio-temporal frame of reference that is fundamentally important. It is open to debate whether that frame of reference is described in objective terms or relayed in narrative of the victor. Some attempt will be made to question some of the assumptions underlying a late Victorian reading of the events and processes which produce Kurtz.

In drawing the character of Kurtz, Conrad offers the possibility of viewing him as a construction of colonial power at once corrupted and corruptive. The essential element in any analysis of Kurtz's role is power, especially power which is repressive, and which negates the coloniser's claim to be a beneficent presence. For Kurtz to be in any sense a 'legitimate' presence in the Congo, there needs to be a justification for his presence there. The redeeming factor in this case would be to present Kurtz as the repository of European ideals. He is the product of a culture

itself formed of contradictory beliefs but which generally subscribes to the view that subordinate cultures are *per se* inferior. The impossibility of separating cultural values from contemporary literature is emphasised in Conrad's portrayal of Kurtz, a representative of Belgian colonial ambition who also had associations with the supreme imperialist power, Britain:

This initiated wraith from the back of Nowhere honoured me with its amazing confidence before it vanished altogether. This was because it could speak English to me. *The original Kurtz had been educated partly in England and – as he was good enough to say himself – his sympathies were in the right place. His mother was half-English, his father was half-French. All Europe contributed to the making of Kurtz, and by and by I learned that most appropriately the International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs had entrusted him with the making of a report for its future guidance.* [HoD, 50] (my italics)

There is a suggestion in this extract that Europe as a political and cultural unit has produced Kurtz, and he becomes a trope for colonial overseers wherever imperialistic trade is in evidence. The obvious irony associated with the International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs is indicative of Conrad's own awareness of the bizarre relationship between that which Europeans believed they were about and the realities of the barbaric trade in Africa. The issue becomes, of course, the subject of intertextual re-figuring in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. The focal centring of Kurtz makes it difficult to argue for anything other than a colonial perspective on the text, because no other perspective is offered to the reader. It is singularly in keeping with the logic of the narrative that this should be the case: Marlow is, after all, recounting the tale on the deck of the *Nellie*, at anchor in the Thames estuary, to a group of British listeners. Said suggests that this is a structural device which necessarily limits the perspective of the narrative:

Yet neither Conrad nor Marlow gives us a full view of what is *outside* the world-conquering attitudes embodied by Kurtz, Marlow, the circle of listeners on the deck of the *Nellie*, and Conrad. By that I mean that *Heart of Darkness* works so effectively because its politics and aesthetics are, so to speak, imperialist, which in the closing years of the nineteenth century seemed to be at the same time an aesthetic, politics, and even epistemology inevitable and unavoidable. For if we cannot truly understand someone else's experience and if we must therefore depend upon the assertive authority of the sort of power that Kurtz wields as a white man in the jungle or that Marlow, another white man, wields as narrator, there is no use looking for other, non-imperialist alternatives; the system has simply eliminated them and made them unthinkable. The circularity, the perfect closure of the whole thing is not only aesthetically but also mentally unassailable. [C I, 26]

The importance of Said's point cannot be over-stressed because of what follows from it. Of central importance to this thesis is the argument that texts from a given period can be related, that is to say can be opened up to comparative readings on the basis of a common frame of reference, and, secondly, texts can be associated with historical processes. The critical framework is therefore at least double-layered: texts can be related to other texts within an epoch, and an attempt at analysing the relationship of epoch to literary output can also be undertaken. Importantly, there are significant differences between texts, the portrayal of women in 'The Beach of Falesá' and in *Heart of Darkness*, is one example, yet these texts operate within the same framework.

Perhaps the reason so much psychoanalytic critical attention has been focused on *Heart of Darkness* is due to the denial of the Other in any meaningful sense. What remains has a self-referential quality to all of Kurtz's expressions of 'horror', drawing attention to the internalised processes rather than acknowledging an external presence other than the exotic female. Conrad's ironic detachment does not preclude the *existence* of another culture, it does, however, serve to emphasise the relative insignificance of it in terms of the priorities of the colonising power.

Arguably the most significant episode in *Heart of Darkness* is Marlow's meeting with Kurtz, the erstwhile mysterious figure of the Inner Station. However, it is worth noting that before that meeting Marlow is confronted by the Russian sailor whom Marlow scorns as gullible for having believed Kurtz's explanation of the skulls on poles. Nevertheless, it should be said that Marlow has no foundation for this attitude of superiority which may itself be representative of the colonial attitude since it adopts much of the disparaging, and paternalistic, dismissal of alien cultures. Conrad shows that the Russian may indeed have had greater knowledge of Kurtz than Marlow could acquire in the short time he was in contact with Kurtz:

He had, as he informed me proudly, managed to nurse Kurtz through two illnesses (he alluded to it as you would to some risky feat) but as a rule Kurtz wandered alone far in the depths of the forest. 'Very often coming to this station, I had to wait days and days before he would turn up,' he said. 'Ah! it was worth waiting for – sometimes.' 'What was he doing? exploring or what?' I asked. Oh! Yes. Of course he had discovered lots of villages, a lake too – he did not know exactly in what direction; it was dangerous to enquire too much – but mostly his expeditions had been for ivory. 'But he had no goods to trade with by that time,' I objected. 'There's a good lot of cartridges left even yet,' he answered, looking away. 'To speak plainly, he raided the country,' I said. He nodded. 'Not alone, surely!' He muttered something about the villages round that lake. 'Kurtz got the tribe to follow him, did he?' I suggested. He fidgeted a little. 'They adored him,' he said. The tone of these words was so extraordinary that I looked at him searchingly. It was curious to see his mingled eagerness and reluctance to speak of Kurtz. The man filled his life, occupied his thoughts, swayed his emotions. 'What can you expect!' he burst out; 'he came to them with thunder and lightning, you know – and they had never seen anything like it – and very terrible. He could be very terrible. You can't judge Mr. Kurtz as you would an ordinary man. No, no, no! Now – just to give you an idea – I don't mind telling you, he wanted to shoot me too one day – but I don't judge him.' 'Shoot you!' I cried 'What for?' 'Well, I had a small lot of ivory the chief of that village near my house gave me. You see I used to shoot game for them. Well, he wanted it and wouldn't hear reason. He declared he would shoot me unless I gave him the ivory and then cleared out of the country because he could do so, and had a fancy for it, and there was nothing on earth to prevent him killing whom he jolly well pleased. [HoD, 55-56]

The Russian's attitude towards Kurtz, and more especially towards the attitudes of the tribesmen, is more realistic than that of Marlow. The basis of his realism is practical knowledge based on experience. The effect of this is to suggest to the reader that Marlow's inclination to make assumptions based upon notional racial absolutes is, in its essence, racist. Conrad thereby problematises the narratorial reliability of Marlow. Marlow treats the Russian *almost* as if he were a native, perhaps in a demonstration of Victorian xenophobia, but also in a way that underlines Conrad's awareness of the primacy of English as a commercial and literary *lingua franca* in a self-referentially ironic manner. It may be further argued that only the Russian's whiteness allows the possibility of communication in any event, because it separates him from the 'darkness' of Africa. It is clear that the Russian acts from a complicated amalgam of fear and respect where Kurtz is concerned and this amalgam is representative of the relationship between Kurtz and the tribe from the lakeshore.

Marlow's own 'judgment' of Kurtz is based upon the extent to which Marlow considers Kurtz to have 'fallen' because of his uncontrollable lusts. These lusts have given the Freudian critics of *Heart of Darkness* much material for conjecture, but equally it can be argued that Conrad, eschewing Freud, used the term as a metaphor for the rapacity of European colonialism. He may have done so in full awareness of the hostility such a text would generate amongst critics and the reading public alike.

The final hours before Kurtz's death are of deep significance in attempting to understand Marlow's view of Kurtz and the complex issues surrounding these very different men brought together by an apparently common purpose:

'Kurtz discoursed. A voice! a voice! It rang deep to the very last. It survived his strength to hide in the magnificent folds of eloquence the barren darkness of his heart. Oh, he struggled, he struggled. The wastes of his weary brain were haunted by shadowy images now – images of wealth and fame revolving obsequiously around his unextinguishable gift of noble and lofty expression. My Intended, my station, my career, my ideas – these were the subjects for the occasional utterances of elevated sentiments. The shade of the original Kurtz frequented the bedside of the hollow sham whose fate it was to be buried presently in the mould of primeval earth. But both the diabolic love and the unearthly hate of the mysteries it had penetrated fought for the possession of that soul satiated with primitive emotions, avid of lying fame, of sham distinction, of all the appearances of success and power.

'Sometimes he was contemptibly childish. He desired to have kings meet him at railway stations on his return from some ghastly Nowhere, where he intended to accomplish great things. 'You show them you have in you something that is really profitable, and then there will be no limits to the recognition of your ability,' he would say. 'Of course you must take care of the motives – right motives – always.' The long reaches that were like one and the same reach, monotonous bends that were exactly alike, slipped past the steamer with their multitude of secular trees looking patiently after this grimy fragment of another world, the forerunner of change, of conquest, of trade, of massacres, of blessings. I looked ahead – piloting. 'Close the shutter,' said Kurtz suddenly one day; 'I can't bear to look at this.' I did so. There was a silence. 'Oh, but I will wring your heart yet!' he cried at the invisible wilderness. [HoD, 67]

The common purpose is, of course, the pursuit of wealth, the primary goal of the Imperial project, and Kurtz, the Russian and Marlow are all implicated: some nations may be worse than others in their behaviour, but they are alike in their greed. The arrangement of characters in *The Ebb Tide* similarly demonstrates the eclectic nature of 'the beach': again, Stevenson and Conrad can be seen to share a common awareness of the competition for riches.

Kurtz recognises his shortcomings on this journey, especially in relation to the balance to be reached between conflicting loyalties as

represented by duty to the Company and to the native tribe. On another level, Marlow can now accept Kurtz, and his failings, because he represents the 'civilised' man facing up to his weaknesses. This illustrates a change of heart on Marlow's part: he has viewed Kurtz previously as the ultimate egotist, pursuing his lusts unbridled by Western ethics having adopted the customs of an African tribe.

Conrad highlights the assumptions upon which Marlow charts Kurtz's decline: the adoption of tribal customs, for example, would, in Marlow's terms of reference, represent the apogee of 'going native'. Patrick Brantlinger suggests that this process was not uncommon:

A great many Kurtz-like Europeans "went native" in Africa, often to the extent of practicing genocide as a hobby; some were even rumored to practice cannibalism. According to Sir Harry H. Johnston, first governor of British Central Africa, "I have been increasingly struck with the rapidity with which such members of the white race as are not of the best class, can throw over the restraints of civilisation and develop into savages of unbridled lust and abominable cruelty." Kurtz is not a member of the *worst* 'class' of the white race, however; Conrad is talking about a quite common pattern of behaviour.²⁵

The limitations of Marlow as a narrator perhaps become clearer at this point in the text: he is compromised by the existence of a 'frame-narrator' early in the text. Conrad further complicates the question of his reliability, or authority, by obscuring the distinction between the frame-narrator's overview of the Imperial project and Marlow's own moral position. It is clear, however, that Conrad wishes to draw a different conclusion, or at least open up the possibility for a different reading by showing the tribesmen to be protective of Kurtz in an ironic undercutting of Victorian racial absolutes. The black people, in short, behave better than whites in *Heart of Darkness* and Conrad presents them as having possession of qualities of humanity missing from the representatives of colonial power.

Once again, Conrad appears to parallel Stevenson's appraisal of Uma as the repository of worth in the concluding section of 'The Beach of Falesá'. It may be argued that Kurtz is corrupted not by Africa, or Africans, but by Western materialism which drives him to produce more and more ivory to satisfy the demands of the Company back in Europe. As a direct result of this process Kurtz corrupts the values of the tribe by involving its members in the ivory trade. It would be an oversimplification to argue that the Africans were wholly unaware of the ramifications of involvement with Kurtz, but an important hegemonic balance is at play in the relationship and it is one which characterises colonial discourse throughout the nineteenth century, most particularly, but not exclusively, in India.

This is an important point and one that Conrad addresses in *Heart of Darkness*. The business of colonial rule ran smoothly where local support could be established. Kurtz's apparent decline to the level of the tribesmen, as Marlow would have it, is more likely the manifestation of an awareness of the need to gain the confidence of the local population in order to secure the trade upon which Kurtz's, and the Company's, wealth depended. Conrad emphasises the complex nature of the relationship between Kurtz and the indigenous population. The model for such a philosophy is to be found in the relationship between coloniser and colonised interests in India earlier in the nineteenth century:

The territorial annexations and reforming tendencies of the East India Company had affronted many sections of Indian society in the half-century since the victorious conclusion of the Maratha Wars in 1818 had unquestionably established the British as the paramount power in the sub-continent. For the vast majority of Indian people it was probably irrelevant whether the Mughal Emperor, the Maratha Confederacy or the East India Company ruled them; the perennial struggle for subsistence was the

overwhelming preoccupation of peasant India, fatalistic and passive, and an unlikely recruiting ground for blood stained revolutionaries. [EMP, 70]

One may conclude that Conrad witnessed examples of similar relationships during his time in the Congo and, in 'An Outpost of Progress', Makola is an example of the African who recognises that the might of European materialism cannot be opposed and must therefore be accommodated, however reluctantly. Kurtz may be said to have manifestly failed in his purpose not by 'going native' but, rather ironically, by failing to adopt the mind-set of the Africans and the virtues they practised towards him. Marlow's judgment is once again called into question: he equates the tribal customs with evil in a predictable reversal of the actuality, and Conrad may be suggesting that Marlow's insistence on the hegemony of European value-systems shows how this attitude blinds him to the positive attributes of the African tribesmen.

However, there is a wider ethical consideration that connects *Heart of Darkness* to Stevenson's *The Ebb Tide* and it involves the process of de-humanisation which occurs at the point where people imagine other races to be inferior to themselves. Marlow is bound up in the assumptions of racial superiority characteristic of much of Victorian fiction, but Conrad illustrates the limitations of late-nineteenth-century attitudes throughout the narrative, as outlined above in relation to Marlow's appreciation of the tribesmen. There is a further link to Stevenson's *The Ebb Tide* based on a shared awareness of the ambivalent nature of colonialism. Both Stevenson and Conrad were aware of the negative aspects of colonial ambition but both seem to share an attitude that pre-supposes the existence of benefits

for coloniser and colonised alike where peaceful co-existence is possible. The difficulty that arises here, of course, is that there is no space for the representation of the Other, who must therefore exist in a subservient relationship in both actual and fictive terms. In the context of the present thesis that is important but the focus is firmly on the development of an early form of Modernism, consequently the predicament of the central character is paramount.

Stevenson and Conrad, however, utilise the framework of European colonial ambition to question fundamental ethical issues and both, ultimately, problematize doctrinal theology and place the responsibility for ethical behaviour firmly with the individual. The centrally important element in both Stevenson and Conrad is the extent to which *individuals* are emphasised and, in particular, their predicaments foregrounded. The responsibility for behaviour good or bad lies with the individual. The ambivalent nature of the individual is also highly significant and symbolises the complex nature of the Imperial project. The late novels of Stevenson, and Conrad's early fiction are characterised by these concerns. The focal emphasis is always on the white European: that is determined by prevailing attitudes, but there is an awareness of the damage done both to blacks and whites alike. M. M. Mahood observes:

Kurtz, the alleged lightbearer, is a physical, mental, and moral wreck. The obverse of the harm done by the white man to Africa was the harm that his 'moral isolation' (the term is Conrad's) in Africa did to the white man. The former aspect of the tale was what attracted the idealistic reformer Cunningham-Graham, whereas for Conrad's more conservative friends such as William Blackwood it was a tale about 'the process of de-civilisation'.²⁶

The novel of predicament often focuses on the individual's impressions of the nature of his inability to fit into a particular way of

being and both Stevenson and Conrad deal with such considerations in ways which seem to pre-figure acknowledged Modernist writers. The underlying uneasiness about the colonial endeavour expressed by both writers *is* ambivalent in its nature, but it is this very ambivalence which subverts the certainty and assurance of the high Victorian period. Furthermore, it suggests a radical, ‘modern’ departure towards a literary form far removed from the ‘adventure yarn’ genre. Randall Stevenson cites J. Hillis Miller as one critic who has acknowledged the process in terms of Conrad’s fiction, specifically in a reference to *Lord Jim*:

Victorian novels were often relatively stabilized by the presence of an omniscient narrator...a trustworthy point of view and also a safe vantage point...in *Lord Jim* no point of view is entirely trustworthy.²⁷

Heart of Darkness may be viewed as a centrally-important early modernist text, partly because of the ‘predicament’ element but also because it challenges assumptions about the nature of the Imperial Project.

This thesis will seek to explore evidence that may support the view that Stevenson, in *The Ebb Tide* (first published in 1893), precedes Conrad in the adoption of a novel form which represents the shift from adventure fiction towards the Modernist novel of predicament. Moreover, it will also be suggested that in moving towards the adoption of a Modernist methodology, both writers retain technical devices, for example the shaping discourse of adventure writing, that prevent them being viewed as full-blown Modernists. Stevenson’s *The Ebb Tide* is a fundamentally important novel in this context and represents the next stage in a process of development initiated with the writing of ‘The Beach of Falesá’.

- ¹ Chinua Achebe, 'An Image of Africa, Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*', in *Joseph Conrad*, ed. and with an 'Introduction' by Andrew Michael Roberts, *Longman Critical Reader Series*, (London & New York: Longman, 1998), pp.109-123 (p. 117).
- ² See Patrick Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism, 1830-1914* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1988). The discussion of *Heart of Darkness* in the concluding chapter 'Epilogue: Kurtz's "Darkness" and Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*' (pp. 255-274) opens with reference to Cedric Watts's comment to the effect that Achebe and Conrad are essentially in agreement about imperialism.
- ³ Joseph Conrad, 'Heart of Darkness', *A Case Study in Contemporary Criticism*, ed. by Ross C. Murfin (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989). This text examines Conrad's novel from the critical perspectives of Psychoanalysis, Reader-Response Theory, Feminist Criticism, Deconstruction and New Historicism.
- ⁴ See, Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness*, p. 181.
- ⁵ Quoted in Maurice N. Hennessy, *Congo: A Brief History and Appraisal* (London: Pall Mall Press, 1961), p.13.
- ⁶ *Joseph Conrad's Letters to Cunninghame-Graham*, ed. by C.T. Watts (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), p.80.
- ⁷ The 'anonymous' reviewer was Harold Frederic. See, *Joseph Conrad's Letters to Cunninghame-Graham*, p.79.
- ⁸ *The Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad*, ed. by Frederick R. Karl & Laurence Davies, 8 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983-86), II (1983), 106-110, 107.
- ⁹ *Collected Letters*, II, 371.
- ¹⁰ Joseph Conrad, 'An Outpost of Progress' (1898) in *Tales of Unrest* (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1977), p.84.
- ¹¹ *Collected Letters*, I, 61-3.
- ¹² John Buchan, *The Power House* (1913; Edinburgh, 1916), p. 64. (Quoted from the *Introduction to the World's Classics* edition of *The Thirty-Nine Steps*).
- ¹³ John A. McClure, *Kipling and Conrad: The Colonial Fiction* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981), p.92.
- ¹⁴ Frederick R. Karl, *A Reader's Guide to Joseph Conrad* (1960, 1969; Syracuse N.Y.:1997), pp. 117-18.
- ¹⁵ Joseph Conrad, *Youth: A Narrative, and Two Other Stories* (London: Wm Blackwood, 1902). The third story in the collection is 'The End of the Tether'.
- ¹⁶ John Brannigan, 'On the Edge of a Black and Incomprehensible Frenzy: A New Historicist Reading of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*', in *New Historicism and Cultural Materialism* (London: Macmillan, 1998), p.147.
- ¹⁷ The conclusion of 'The Beach of Falesà' constitutes one such example. Wiltshire's ruminative musing is interrupted by the recurring theme of miscegenation as he is reminded of the predicament he faces regarding his 'half-caste' daughters. In *The Ebb Tide*, the beachcombers are similarly disturbed in the midst of their starvation-induced fantasies about food and forced to accept the stark reality of their situation. In both examples, the intrusion of reality forces a swift, and harsh, re-assessment of the facts, as if to emphasise the 'alien' nature of the experience within an alien and hostile environment.
- ¹⁸ Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, ed. by Robert Kimbough, 3rd edn, (New York: Norton, 1998), p.7. Subsequent page references are to this edition and are given in brackets in the text.
- ¹⁹ W.B. Yeats, *Collected Poems*, ed. and Introduced by Daniel Albright (London: J.M Dent & Son, 1992), p.235.
- ²⁰ 'Alienist' in this context means a medical practitioner specialising in mental illness.
- ²¹ Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Vintage, 1994), pp. 26-7. Subsequent references are to this edition and are given in brackets in the text.
- ²² Dennis Judd, *Empire: The British Imperial Experience From 1765 to the Present* (London: Harper Collins, 1996), p.66. Subsequent references are to this edition and are given in brackets in the text.

²⁴ See, Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness*, p.193.

²⁵ Patrick Brantlinger, 'Heart of Darkness: Anti-Imperialism, Racism or Impressionism?' in *Heart of Darkness, A Case Study in Contemporary Criticism*, ed. by Ross C. Murfin (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989), pp. 277-298 (p. 291).

²⁶ M.M. Mahood, *The Colonial Encounter: A Reading of Six Novels* (London: Rex Collings, 1997), p. 16.

²⁷ Randall Stevenson, *Modernist Fiction: An Introduction*, rev. edn., (London & New York: Prentice Hall, 1998), p. 25.

The Ebb Tide: Stevenson's Proto-Modernist Critique of Empire

A core objective in the following discussion of *The Ebb Tide* will be to show how Stevenson takes the concerns of 'The Beach of Falesá' a stage further, and presents them in a way that can be described as proto-Modernist. Critical assessments of *The Ebb Tide* have tended to point to this text as being in some way a departure from Stevenson's earlier works, even those written in the South Seas, and some critics, for example Fowler¹ and, more recently, Sandison² have been at pains to show that in this text Stevenson has adopted new methods and has turned his interest towards new subjects. This is only partly true because much of the thematic foundation of *The Ebb Tide* can be traced back to 'The Beach of Falesá', a work produced around the same time that focuses on similar issues, particularly the relationships between dominant and subordinate cultures. It may be argued that in a sense *The Ebb Tide* is a pivotal text within the Stevenson *oeuvre*, but it is in terms of its form as well as its thematics that it breaks new ground.

Stevenson responds to wider influences than those based solely on literary theorising with Henry James and other contemporaries, and the importance of events in the Pacific and the concerns surrounding an empire in decay bear in on his fiction in the last few years of his life. He is writing in a period of change so radical that one would have to look to the political and social upheavals that occur at the epistemic break between neo-classicism and romanticism for an adequate comparison. *The Ebb Tide* is an important text in its own right, and it is especially significant as

a focal text in a study of similarities between Stevenson and Conrad in the closing years of the nineteenth century. The work done by Lloyd Osbourne, Stevenson's step-son and co-writer of the first, tentative draft of *The Ebb Tide* had no significant impact on the final version of the text which was undertaken solely by Stevenson; consequently he is not the subject of discussion with regard to this thesis.

In his short article '*The Ebb Tide and Victory*'³, Cedric Watts acknowledges similarities between these two texts but stops short of an exhaustive analysis of the thematic and structural resemblances which further connect the fiction of Stevenson and Conrad. In both this chapter, which will focus on *The Ebb Tide* and in the following chapter, which will consider some common themes in *Victory*, an attempt will be made to illustrate the nature of the relationship between the texts. Watts asserts that:

Conrad is usually more sophisticated and intelligent, with a wider range of moral, philosophical and particularly political awareness; and he has richer technical and linguistic resources, greater imaginative panache, and, as a realist, is more persuasively and astutely observant. [TETV, 133]

This appraisal undervalues Stevenson, as an analysis of *The Ebb Tide* will show.

In 'The Beach of Falesá', Stevenson had addressed the controversial issues of miscegenation and exploitative trade, but in *The Ebb Tide* the complex symbolism that underscores the development of linked themes creates an altogether different fiction. *The Ebb Tide* is the key text in relocating Stevenson as a writer involved in an experimental way with modern approaches to fiction writing, and, by referring to letters Stevenson wrote to several influential contemporaries, it will be shown

that it was a text Stevenson himself found to be perplexing and challenging. It is the text that finally distances Stevenson from romances such as *Kidnapped* and *Catriona*. This change resulted in negative comment from people such as Colvin and this is a further indication of the pivotal nature of the work. The relative lack of critical discussion of *The Ebb Tide* following its publication firstly in serialised form, and then as a book requires some explanation, and an analysis of contemporary reviews and more modern criticism will be undertaken.

The Ebb Tide has an apparently insubstantial story-line centred on three beachcombers in Tahiti who are tricked into a scheme to amass wealth but who end up being defeated by the megalomaniacal ruler of an uncharted Pacific island. The issues raised are, however, complex and typify Stevenson's method in his late South Seas fiction. Instead of relying on the highly developed, perhaps even over-written, characterisation of his earlier texts, Stevenson creates an intricate pattern of linked symbols in an attempt to maintain a style that is both economical and clear.

There can be little doubt that Stevenson found *The Ebb Tide* a difficult text to write and indeed he is at his most ingenuous in conveying the extent of this difficulty in a letter to Edmund Gosse, dated 10 June 1893:

Yes, honestly, fiction is very difficult: it is a terrible strain to *carry* your characters all that time. And the difficulty of according the narrative and the dialogue (in a work in the third person) is extreme. That is one reason out of half a dozen why I so often prefer the first. It is much in my mind just now, because of my last work, just off the stocks three days ago; *The Ebb Tide*: a dreadful, grimy business in the third person; where the strain between a vilely realistic dialogue and a narrative style pitched about (in Quarles's phrase) 'four notes higher' than it should have been, has sown my head with grey hairs; or I believe so - if my head escaped, my heart has them.⁴

In addition to the problems associated with the narrative technique, Stevenson had difficulties with the subject matter as he illustrates in a letter to Henry James of 17 June 1893:

It seems as if literature were coming to a stand. I am sure it is with me; and I am sure everybody will say so when they have the privilege of reading *The Ebb Tide*. My dear man the grimness of that story is not to be depicted in words. There are only four characters to be sure, but they are such a troop of swine! And their behaviour is really so deeply beneath any possible standard, that on a retrospect I wonder I have been able to endure them myself until the yarn was finished. Well, there is always one thing: it will serve as a touchstone. If the admirers of Zola admire him for his pertinent ugliness and pessimism, I think they should admire this; but if, as I have long suspected, they neither admire nor understand the man's art, and only wallow in his rancidness like a hound in offal, then they will certainly be disappointed in *The Ebb Tide*. Alas! Poor little tale, it is not *even* rancid.⁵

Part of Stevenson's negativity may well stem from the common response of the artist to a completed work: his awareness that the deficiencies are all too clear and it is too late to effect remediation. It may also be, however, that Stevenson saw that his writing was increasingly concerned with themes which were themselves related to fundamentals that were never far from his mind: 'the troop of swine' raise issues of evil and of individual accountability for one's actions. Certainly, it can be argued that this text constitutes the most pessimistic work that Stevenson had produced to date, going beyond even *The Master of Ballantrae* or *Jekyll and Hyde* in its examination of the darker side of mankind. Like 'The Beach of Falesá', *The Ebb Tide* is located in the South Pacific and deals with the presence of Europeans, a subject that was highly contentious given the prevailing political climate. Written at the time when German, American and British interests converged in the Samoan islands and began negotiating for control, Stevenson's writing focused on the deleterious influence of white colonial rule in the Pacific. Ironically,

however, he is by this period, a white overseer at the plantation of Vailima: it would be possible to conjecture therefore that he is aware of his own complicity in the wider colonial process. Without expressly mentioning guilt, it is interesting that he creates four characters in *The Ebb Tide* each of whom represents a different facet of colonial ingress into the islands. Attwater represents the ruling class and imposes his authority on the local population without regard for their feelings; Herrick is a middle-class representative of the same outlook; and the working-class representatives, Huish and Davis, share particular prejudices regarding the native population broadly based on racist assumptions. There would be, of course, an obvious anachronism in attempting to portray Stevenson as a modern egalitarian, located as he is in the late-nineteenth century, but it can be argued that he is in many ways in advance of his contemporaries in drawing attention to the corruptive power of capital as it impacts on the Pacific races. This is the driving force behind the concern with evil articulated by *The Ebb Tide*'s focus on its 'troop of swine'.

The political climate in Samoa was particularly volatile while Stevenson was writing *The Ebb Tide* and it became clear that the European powers were reluctant to become involved in the conflict between the Samoan chiefs, perhaps preferring to await a military resolution of the problem before subsequently engaging with the victor to negotiate trade agreements. Stevenson was severely critical of British prevarication which would seem to confirm this reading of events and would, moreover, account for his apparent disillusionment with European

standards of behaviour with regard to the islanders: it is against this background that *The Ebb Tide* was written.

The frame narrative of *The Ebb Tide* is important both as a means of connecting two discrete sections of the novel but it has an additional, symbolic, function and that is to illustrate the importance of examining behaviour within a social structure. Furthermore, as a centrally important issue in terms of this thesis, it illustrates points of contact between Stevenson and Conrad and establishes their common interests in the behaviour of men when these frameworks of morality are no longer recognised. It has been suggested by the eminent Stevenson scholar Jenni Calder that Stevenson was only at liberty to write about such issues once he was located outwith Scotland due to the constraints of contemporary social mores.⁶ It can also be argued, however, that until he visited the South Seas, and began to observe Europeans in action there, Stevenson had never had any evidence upon which to base his criticisms. It is only when *he* is located in the South Seas then, that he can begin to write material which is aggressively critical of the Western exploitation of the Pacific. The changes that occur in the movement from 'Trio' to 'Quartette' illustrate the importance of the frame narrative in this text as further analysis will indicate.

The action in *The Ebb Tide* opens 'on the beach', that liminal area which separates different cultures and indicates a place where one has the potential to move one way or another: it thus becomes a location symbolising moral decision making, and it is significant that Davis, Herrick and Huish are situated here at the beginning of the narrative.

Stevenson sets this story some fifty years after European colonisation of the Pacific became widespread and shows that not all the participants in this endeavour were motivated by the desire to bring a beneficent influence to bear on the islanders. The relational framework is predicated upon social class and, like Conrad, Stevenson appears to equate elevated social class with greater moral responsibility in a manner of harking back to the notion of *noblesse oblige*: the importance of this observation will be developed in an analysis of the 'Quartette' later in this discussion.

The tone for the first section of the novel, the 'Trio', is set by Stevenson's opening paragraph:

Throughout the island world of the Pacific, scattered men of many European races and from almost every grade of society carry activity and disseminate disease. Some prosper, some vegetate. Some have mounted the steps of thrones and owned islands and navies. Others again must marry for a livelihood; a strapping, merry, chocolate-coloured dame supports them in sheer idleness; and dressed like natives, but still retaining some foreign element of gait or attitude, still perhaps with some relic (such as a single eye-glass) of the officer and gentleman, they sprawl in palm-leaf verandahs and entertain an island audience with memories of the music hall. And there are still others, less pliable, less capable, less fortunate, perhaps less base, who continue, even in these isles of plenty, to lack bread.⁷

Stevenson, with typical irony, acknowledges in the first few lines that the presence of British, American, German, French and Dutch traders is not necessarily advantageous to the local population and indicates that they have brought disease as well as a vital productivity geared to personal, and imperialist gain. The framework is in place and a variety of symbols are suggested in the opening paragraphs, most powerfully the location of the beachcombers' shelter, an old *calaboose*, or prison. The association with criminality is therefore established, and the text is established, on one level at least, as a critique of the morality of colonialism. However, it is necessary to examine the means by which

Herrick, Davis and Huish come to be in the town of Papeete, a rival to Apia as the ‘Hell of the Pacific’; brought together by ‘common calamity’[4], the three are reduced to the poorest circumstances, having neither food nor money and feeling thoroughly miserable, although, perhaps, ‘less base.’

With typical economy, Stevenson introduces Robert Herrick, the ineffectual Oxford graduate, who despite his background of advantage both social and financial has contrived to be ‘beached’ alongside his less fortunate neighbours. The indication that he is both educated and from middle-class origins is symbolised by the tattered copy of Virgil he carries in his pocket. The book may also represent the high civilisation the Europeans are supposedly spreading in the Pacific, rather than the disease referred to in the foregoing extract. This is his last link to that forgotten world of Merton and comfort, but his attitudes are shifting:

Certainly, if money could have been raised upon the book, Robert Herrick would long ago have sacrificed that last possession; but the demand for literature, which is so marked a feature in some parts of the South Seas, extends not so far as the dead tongues; and the Virgil, which he could not exchange against a meal, had often consoled him in his hunger. He would study it, as he lay with tightened belt on the floor of the old calaboose, seeking favourite passages and finding new ones only less beautiful because they lacked the consecration of remembrance. Or he would pause on random country walks; sit on the pathside, gazing over the sea on the mountains of Eimeo; and dip into the *Aeniad*, seeking *sortes*. And if the oracle (as is the way of oracles) replied with no very certain nor encouraging voice, visions of England at least would throng upon the exile’s memory: the busy schoolroom, the green playing fields, holidays at home and the perennial roar of London, and the fireside, and the white head of his father. For it is the destiny of those grave, restrained and classic writers, with whom we make enforced and often painful acquaintanceship at school, to pass into the blood and become native in the memory; so that a phrase of Virgil speaks not so much of Mantua or Augustus, but of English places and the student’s own irrevocable youth. [TET, 4-5]

Stevenson emphasises Herrick’s response to his situation: he resorts to Virgil, which always opens, as Alastair Fowler shrewdly points out, ‘at

facilis descensus Averni: “each had made a long apprenticeship in going downward”(18.7).⁸ Herrick is not a mendacious, calculating exploiter: he has drifted to his present location carried, as Stevenson suggests on the title page, by a force greater than himself: ‘There is a tide in the affairs of men/ Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune;/ Omitted, all the voyage of their life/ Is bound in shallows and in miseries.’⁹ Stevenson’s Shakespearean reference can be applied to all of the participants but it is equally clear that only Herrick and Attwater, when he appears in the latter section the ‘Quartette’, have the educational background required to objectify their respective predicaments and relate them to classical and Renaissance texts. It is to the Attwater and Herrick class that the responsibility for spreading civilisation falls. That they should become associated with the spreading of disease, in a literal or metaphorical sense, is ironic. It is left to Davis and Huish to bemoan their lot and to regret missed opportunities: but, their concern is with empty bellies rather than fine poetry, and thus Stevenson distinguishes the socially advantaged from the disadvantaged. The elevated preoccupation of Herrick is opposed with the pragmatic concerns of Davis and Huish here and Herrick’s ineffectualness is further highlighted: removed from the *locus* of advantage he is useless to himself and a burden upon the others. He is representative of a class in decline, he appears effete by comparison to Davis and Huish, and Stevenson indicates that the flaw is in the man, a *fin-de-siècle* example of *hamartia* that finds its nemesis in Attwater. Herrick’s own lack of commitment has landed him in his present predicament, a theme that is discernible in ‘modern’ writing most

certainly, but not exclusively so. Stevenson may be considering his own situation in this text, having at various junctures in his career expressed doubts about the validity of writing as a means of earning a living, and the description of Herrick's early life presents an English equivalent of Stevenson's own background and early development:

Robert Herrick was the son of an intelligent, active and ambitious man, small partner in a considerable London house. Hopes were conceived of the boy; he was sent to a good school, gained there an Oxford scholarship, and proceeded in course to the western University. With all his talent and taste (and he had much of both) Robert was deficient in consistency and intellectual manhood, wandered in by-paths of study, worked at music or metaphysics when he should have been at Greek, and took at last a paltry degree. [TET, 5]

Stevenson's reference to Herrick's lack of application may be an indicator of identification with the young man's past and an acknowledgement of his own failure to match up to parental expectations at a similar age. The middle-class narrator of *The Ebb Tide* shares a common background with both Stevenson and Herrick and this may be Stevenson's method of associating himself with failures and shortcomings in the class responsible for the administration of empire. Furthermore, Stevenson has Herrick embark, as he himself had done, on a career he does not relish:

Almost at the same time, the London house was disastrously wound up; Mr Herrick must begin the world again as a clerk in a strange office, and Robert relinquish his ambitions and accept with gratitude a career that he detested and despised. He had no head for figures, no interest in affairs, detested the constraint of hours and despised the aims and the success of merchants. To grow rich was none of his ambitions: rather to do well. A worse or a more bold young man would have refused the destiny; perhaps tried his fortune with his pen; perhaps enlisted. Robert, more prudent, possibly more timid, consented to embrace that way of life in which he could most readily assist his family. But he did so with a mind divided; fled the neighbourhood of former comrades; and chose, out of several positions placed at his disposal, a clerkship in New York. [TET, 5]

The parallel is, of course, with Stevenson the failed engineer or the failed advocate, not Stevenson the professional writer. Separated from community and comrades, Herrick is propelled towards an interminable decline until he finds himself 'beached' penniless and without self-respect. He had left San Francisco onboard *The City of Papeete* dreaming of fortunes to be made in copra and pearls but he has abandoned the family name:

But if Herrick had gone there with any manful purpose, he would have kept his father's name: the *alias* betrayed his moral bankruptcy; he had struck his flag; he entertained no hope to reinstate himself or help his straitened family; and he came to the islands (where he knew the climate to be soft, bread cheap and manners easy) a skulker from life's battle and his own immediate duty. Failure, he had said, was his portion: let it be a pleasant failure. [TET, 6]

Herrick's journey to the South Seas via San Francisco is a parallel of the voyage undertaken by Stevenson on board the *Casco*, and the reference to skulking 'from life's battle' may link to Stevenson's perceptions about the legitimacy of writing as a career already mentioned. Herrick loses his identity in the rush to escape a past littered with the debris of failure and in an ironic twist, he is washed up with those other examples of human flotsam. Davis and Huish. At this point in the narrative, Stevenson separates Herrick, Davis and Huish only in respect of social background: in every other respect they are bound together by common predicament. The juxtaposition of Davis and Huish with Herrick connects with the thematic and formal concerns of *The Ebb Tide*. The formal structure that results from the juxtaposition contributes to the production of this proto-Modernist text. The three characters may represent the three major prongs of the Anglo-Saxon Imperial project: the English officer class, the English people and the American cousin, with

whom there is a special relationship. However, none of these characters correspond to the Kiplingesque unsung heroes of Empire to be found, for example, in 'Only a Subaltern' (1888) or 'Soldiers Three' (1888). In Herrick, Huish and Davis, Stevenson presents 'hollow men' and their hollowness embodies and reflects the hollowness at the centre of the Imperial project. Davis is also hiding behind an assumed name as the narrator suggests in the following passage:

The moon shone too, with bull's-eye sweeps, on his companions: on the stalwart frame of the American who called himself Brown and was known to be a master-mariner in some disgrace; and on the dwarfish person, the pale eyes and toothless smile of a vulgar and bad-hearted cockney clerk. Here was society for Robert Herrick! The Yankee skipper was a man at least; he had sterling qualities of tenderness and resolution; he was one whose hand you could take without a blush. But there was no redeeming grace about the other, who called himself sometimes Hay and sometimes Tompkins and laughed at the discrepancy; who had been employed in every store in Papeete, for the creature was able in his way; who had been discharged from each in turn, for he was wholly vile; who had alienated all his old employers so that they passed him on the street as if he were a dog - and all his old comrades so that they shunned him as they would a creditor. [TET, 7]

Davis harbours a secret, however, and it emerges as the beachcombers are engaged in writing letters home after Davis has acquired paper from the consul in Papeete. All three have to resort to lying in their letters to loved ones in a final admission of their descent into uselessness. It emerges that in a drunken stupor, Davis has been responsible for the loss of his ship:

'What do you know about me? If you had commanded the finest barque that ever sailed from Portland, Maine; if you had been drunk in your berth when she struck the breakers in Fourteen Island Group, and hadn't had the wit to stay there and drown, but come on deck and given drunken orders, and lost six lives - I could understand your talking then! There,' he said more quietly, 'that's my yarn, and now you know it. It's a pretty one for the father of a family. Five men and a woman murdered. Yes, there was a woman on board and hadn't no business to be either. Guess I sent her to hell, if there is such a place. I never dared go home again; and the wife and the little ones went to England to her father's place. I don't know what's come to them,' he added, with a bitter shrug. [TET, 19]

The three are portrayed as representations of fallen man, not as facets of outright 'evil' necessarily (they are arguably too inconsequential to warrant that description), but they are the metaphorical brothers of Case, Kayerts and Carrier: the labourers of empire despised by the overseer and aboriginal alike. Having described Herrick's fall, Stevenson in the next passage makes reference to a ship from Peru which has carried influenza to Tahiti, and to the town of Papeete in particular. Once again, Stevenson focuses on the irony of the situation: it is disease that is being spread by Europeans, not civilisation. A double-layered image is therefore effected: the symbolic sickness of the beachcombers, washed up on Tahiti, useless and parasitic, is mirrored by an actual disease visited on the native population by other outsiders in a powerful statement about the extraneous influences bearing in on the indigenous populations of the South Seas. The bringing and spreading of disease was a very topical issue and Stevenson equates white influence and disease in this passage:

From all around the *purao*¹⁰ arose and fell a dismal sound of men coughing and strangling as they coughed. The sick natives, with the islanders' impatience of a touch of fever, had crawled from their houses to be cool, and squatting on the shore or on the beached canoes, painfully expected the new day. Even as the crowing of cocks goes about the country in the night from farm to farm, accesses of coughing arose, and spread, and died in the distance, and sprang up again. Each miserable shiverer caught the suggestion from his neighbour, was torn for some minutes by that cruel ecstasy, and left spent and without voice or courage when it passed. If a man had pity to spend, Papeete beach, on that cold night and in that infected season, was a place to spend it on. And of all the sufferers, perhaps the least deserving but surely the most pitiable was the London clerk. [TET, 7-8]

Huish is introduced into the narrative in the midst of the epidemic: Stevenson points out that Huish is not accustomed to the rigours of life on the beach but his fortitude in the face of his predicament is laudable. In a

very fundamental sense, Huish may be vulgar and common but he possesses a primitive durability and, unlike Herrick his social superior, a quality of courage:

He was used to another life, to houses, beds, nursing and the dainties of the sickroom; he lay here now, in the cold open, exposed to the gusting of the wind, and with an empty belly. He was besides infirm; the disease shook him to the vitals; and his companions watched his endurance with surprise. A profound commiseration filled them and contended with and conquered their abhorrence. The disgust attendant on so ugly a sickness magnified this dislike; at the same time, and with more than compensating strength, shame for a sentiment so inhuman bound them the more straitly to his service; and even the evil they knew of them swelled their solicitude, for the thought of death is always least supportable when it draws near to the merely sensual and selfish. Sometimes they held him up; sometimes, with mistaken helpfulness, they beat him between the shoulders; and when the poor wretch lay back ghastly and spent after a paroxysm of coughing, they would sometimes peer into his face, doubtfully exploring it for any mark of life. There is no one but has some virtue; that of the clerk was courage; and he would make haste to reassure them in a pleasantry, not always decent.

[TET, 8]

Huish, then, is accorded one virtue, and it is perhaps significant to note that Stevenson mitigates the impression of Huish as the member of the trio who typifies the dregs of humanity by this concession. Huish's courage is important at a later stage in the narrative and it is worth noting that Stevenson makes the reader aware of this quality on the occasion when he introduces the character for the first time. One cannot, therefore, simply dismiss Huish out of hand; in common with Herrick and Davis he is not a caricature, but perhaps the three hollow men are representative, even archetypal, contemporary examples of whites in the South Pacific.

As Huish recovers from the coughing attack, Herrick recounts a tale in which he is given a magic carpet he uses to return to England. Huish is disappointed that Herrick uses the opportunity to return to the house of his parents, imagining that he would have utilised the carpet to greater effect in an orgy of eating and drinking around Piccadilly: his tastes are purely

sensual. The sea-captain contributes his own version of how he would have used the opportunity and outlines a vision of food and drink not dissimilar to that of Huish, except that he describes toys and treats for his wife and children. Davis's insistence on providing for his wife and child is indicative of his lack of genuine self-awareness: he has abandoned them to all intents and purposes and Stevenson may be emphasising his guilt rather than revealing a familial tenderness. Their ruminations are brought to an abrupt conclusion when following Huish's 'I defy the devil to make me worse off' [12], a thunderstorm drives all three back to the calaboose for shelter. Drenched and cold, Herrick and Davis huddle beside Huish in an attempt to get warmth and rest. Stevenson creates a realistic scene of physical suffering here, but it serves only to anticipate the moral decline of the characters later in the narrative.

The differing narratives are significant: Herrick admits under questioning by Davis that it is his 'old folks' door he has arrived at; he does, however, enter but does not report subsequent events, and the reader speculates that this outcome is linked to Herrick's own perception of his failure and of his deep sense of shame. In his appraisal of *The Ebb Tide*, Alan Sandison raises the spectre of prodigality and looks for an explanation of Herrick's behaviour in this direction:

His tale has deposited him at a door - his parents' door which is where it halts; and the significance of that truncation is that it avoids the meeting between son and father, for the 'frame-tale' here *is* a parable, one which haunts Stevenson's fiction: the parable of the prodigal son. Herrick, so 'conscious of talents and acquirements' cannot bring himself to confess his failure to his father and seek his blessing.¹¹

Sandison's fascination with doors and closets (he makes reference to 'The Story of the Door' in the sub-title to his chapter on *Jekyll and Hyde*), and

the relationship of Louis and Thomas Stevenson, is understandable within the context of the line of enquiry he is following, but it is not the only productive line of enquiry that may be followed in respect of *The Ebb Tide*. It may be posited that Stevenson employs Herrick as a metaphor for the class that is willingly implicated in the processes of British colonialism. Herrick, like Attwater, is an Oxbridge product, the stuff from which empire-builders are made and yet, he is the weak man of the three. It may be possible to see Herrick as an Oxbridge 'foot-soldier', juxtaposed with Attwater as high-powered Oxbridge. Despite his weakness, Herrick wishes to act with decency as if some vestiges of his upbringing had survived his gradual decline. The implication is that Herrick has retained the morality of Victorian England, and his predicament is embedded in that very belief system: it is in the appreciation of his failure to live up to that code that his guilt is located. He has to rely on his background, but there is vacuity at the centre of Herrick's moral system that is ultimately disabling and which leaves him stranded on the beach. Moreover, significant though this is, Herrick is important not just as an individual but also as an embodiment of an aspect of Empire. He is, in almost every sense, helpless without the apparatus of civilised surroundings. Without the framework of civilisation as he understands it, Herrick is lost:

He paused before a clean space, took the pencil out, and pondered. Vanity, so hard to dislodge, awoke in him. We call it vanity, at least; perhaps unjustly. Rather it was the bare sense of his existence prompted him; the sense of his life, the one thing wonderful, to which he scarce clung with a finger. From his jarred nerves, there came a strong sentiment of coming change; whether good or ill, he could not say: change, he knew no more; change, with inscrutable veiled face, approaching noiseless. With the feeling, came the vision of a concert room, the rich hues of instruments, the silent audience, and the loud voice of the symphony. 'Destiny knocking at the door,' he thought; drew a stave on the plaster, and wrote in the famous phrase from the Fifth Symphony¹². 'So,' thought he, 'they will know that I loved

music and had classical tastes. They? He, I suppose: the unknown, kindred spirit that shall come some day and read my *memor querela*¹³ Ha, he shall have Latin too! And he added: *terque quaterque beati, quis ante ora patrum*.¹⁴ [TET, 24]

Herrick is locked into an existential dilemma: life only has meaning for him when it is related to his past and associated with western culture: stripped of the externals of that existence he must construct an alternative reality but it draws him back to the past rather than enabling him to chart his future. The predicament is shared by all three but Herrick, because of his background, invests it with different significances:

He turned again to his uneasy pacing, but now with an irrational and supporting sense of duty done. He had dug his grave that morning; now he had carved his epitaph; the folds of the toga were composed, why should he delay the insignificant trifle that remained to do? He paused and looked long in the face of the sleeping Huish, drinking disenchantment and distaste of life. He nauseated himself with that vile countenance. Could the thing continue? What bound him now? Had he no rights? Only the obligation to go on, without discharge or furlough, bearing the unbearable? *Ich trage unerträgliches*¹⁵, the quotation rose in his mind; he repeated the whole piece, one of the most perfect of the most perfect of poets; and a phrase struck him like a blow: *Du, stolzes Herz, du hast es ja gewollt*¹⁶. Where was the pride of his heart? And he raged against himself, as a man bites on a sore tooth, in a heady sensuality of scorn. 'I have no pride, I have no heart, no manhood,' he thought, 'or why should I prolong a life more shameful than the gallows? Or why should I have fallen to it? No pride, no capacity, no force. Not even a bandit! And to be starving here with worse than banditti - with this trivial hell-hound.' [TET, 24]

This passage once again emphasises Stevenson's view of the nature of Empire: it is spreading disease rather than civilisation, and its messengers are hollow men.

Stevenson also emphasises the extent of Herrick's disorientation and inability to act in any positive manner to alleviate his difficulties: it is all he can do to look upon Huish with contempt and arrogance, and by showing this aspect of Herrick's character at this point in the narrative, Stevenson prefigures the meeting of Herrick with Attwater. Herrick *must*

hold on to the past or go under: Huish and Davis can focus on the practicalities such as obtaining food by behaving in a demeaning manner such as Davis does on the *kanaka* schooner. Removed from his social structure, Herrick is dysfunctional and lacking in courage. Stevenson implies that Herrick is a burden to himself, to his associates and to the indigenous people he has come amongst.

It is in this sense that Stevenson and Conrad bear comparison; the issues surrounding systems of morality are most similar when they address the behaviour of men removed from the constraints of their own societies, particularly when it is to play the role of white overseer, but as the opening of *The Ebb Tide* illustrates, this seems to apply even when they are *in extremis*. Late-Victorian assumptions about racial superiority are subverted in the exchange between Davis and the *kanakas*: the sea-captain performs like a street-entertainer to secure food for himself, Herrick and Huish and by doing so he creates a stark contrast to the dignified islanders who are in employment onboard the schooner. The irony is obvious but important: the ease with which whites looked down on Polynesians was based on the late-nineteenth-century value system's classification of black and brown races as inferior, but with devastating effect Stevenson, both in 'The Beach of Falesá' and in *The Ebb Tide*, demonstrates that that lie is exposed, and people are the same the world over.

Stevenson emphasises Herrick's despair and self-loathing as it reaches its climax just as Davis returns to the calaboose carrying bread and beer and with his coat pockets bulging with cigars. The geometric arrangement

of the trio is temporarily disrupted as Stevenson dislocates Huish from the action, pairing Davis and Herrick as decision-makers. Huish is immediately enthused and uplifted at this most welcome sight, but he is dismissed by Davis so that the latter can put a proposition to Herrick: as Huish departs Davis notices Herrick's addition to the graffiti on the wall:

'I'll tell you,' said Davis. 'I want to consult you. It's a chance we've got. What's that?' he cried, pointing to the music on the wall.

'What?' said the other. 'Oh, that! It's music; it's a phrase of Beethoven's I was writing up. It means destiny knocking at the door.'

'Does it?' said the captain, rather low; and he went near and studied the inscription. 'And this French?' he asked, pointing to the Latin.

'Oh, it just means I should have been luckier if I had died at home,' returned Herrick impatiently. 'What is this business?'

'Destiny knocking at the door,' repeated the captain; and then, looking over his shoulder, 'Well, Mr Herrick, that's about what it comes to,' he added.

'What do you mean? Explain yourself,' said Herrick.

But the captain was again staring at the music. 'About how long ago since you wrote up this truck?' he asked.

'What does it matter?' exclaimed Herrick. 'I dare say half an hour.'

'My God, it's strange!' cried Davis. 'There's some men would call that accidental: not me. That' - and he drew his thick finger under the music - 'that's what I call providence.'

'You said we had a chance?' asked Herrick.

'Yes, *sir!*' said the captain, wheeling suddenly face to face with his companion. 'I did so. If you're the man I take you for, we have a chance.'

I don't know what you take me for,' was the reply. 'You can scarce take me too low.'

'Shake hands, Mr Herrick,' said the captain. 'I know you. You're a gentleman and a man of spirit. I didn't want to speak before that bummer there; you'll see why. But to you I'll rip it right out. I got a ship.'

[TET, 25-6]

Davis, for all his shame at the loss of his ship, relates to Herrick rather than to Huish, whom he dismisses as a hanger-on. Davis has arranged with the shipping-clerk to take command of the ship which was lying off Papeete flying the yellow flag, the international signal 'Q' for 'quarantine', indicating disease onboard. Once again, Stevenson emphasises the recurring metaphor of disease and its proliferation by the so-called agents of civilisation, the Europeans. The Counsel has agreed to

Davis taking command only after other qualified masters have declined the contract to sail the schooner to Sydney, Australia. The *Farallone* is crewed by *kanakas*, her captain, mate and one crewman having died of smallpox. Stevenson once again re-states the point regarding the bringers of disease and their victims: Europeans bring smallpox and it decimates the indigenous populations of the islands. The circumstances by which the vessel came to be in Tahiti are perplexing, and Davis, characteristically, associates her wayward course with her master's drunkenness. Davis only came to be offered the ship when he called for writing paper to send messages reporting their success to his and to the others' families: the venture is founded on a dishonest motive in its very genesis, therefore. The circularity by which one drunken sea-captain succeeds another is ironic, and the fact that the ship bears disease multiplies the effect of the symbol of death hand-in-hand with white colonialism which occurred in the report of the influenza epidemic. The significance is deeper than the merely literal: here Stevenson takes his reader into regions akin to 'The Ancient Mariner': the symbolic is embedded in depth; disease hangs like a backdrop to the action of the novel as, perhaps, a metaphor for imperialism. However, on a literal level, Stevenson was well aware of the impact of diseases against which the Polynesians had no resistance and recorded an account in *In the South Seas*:

The tribe of Hapaa is said to have numbered some four hundred, when the small-pox came and reduced them by one fourth. Six months later a woman developed tubercular consumption: the disease spread like a fire about the valley, and in less than a year two survivors, a man and a woman, fled from that new-created solitude. A similar Adam and Eve may some day wither among new races, the tragic residue of Britain. When I first heard this story the date staggered me; but I am now inclined to think it possible. Early in the year of my visit¹⁷, for example, or late the year before, a first case of phthisis¹⁸ appeared in a household of seventeen persons, and by the month of

August, when the tale was told me, one soul survived, and that was a boy who had been absent at his schooling. And depopulation works both ways, the doors of death being set wide open, and the door of birth almost closed.¹⁹

The repeated references to disease and disabling illnesses in *The Ebb Tide* reflect the grim reality of life in the Pacific in the closing years of the nineteenth century and the extent to which these diseases were traced back to European sources clearly made a significant impression on Stevenson: that he should have looked to the symbolic nature of this tragedy is not surprising given the extent of the problem. Biographer Frank McLynn offers this reading of the process which brought the Marquesan issue to such prominence in Stevenson's mind:

RLS found the Marquesans more touchy than other Polynesians. They never forgot a slight or an insult - a propensity made more tiresome by the number of things they regarded as insults. When the Stevensons left Anaho Bay they found the presents they had given left untouched upon the beach because they had not gone through the proper protocol, and there were other examples: when Louis offered biscuits and chocolate, when he asked to *buy* some coconuts, when a chance remark offended someone's idea of status. On the other hand he admired their reserve and dignity and thought them the handsomest race in the Pacific: six feet was the *average* height of the males, and they were strongly muscled, free from fat, swift in action and graceful in repose.

The near extinction of the race from smallpox had bred a kind of national neurosis, wherein the thought of death was uppermost in their minds. Allied to this was a more keenly developed fear of ghosts than elsewhere in Polynesia, possibly because within a lifetime's memory the dead far outnumbered the living. The general depression was such that the entire body of Marquesan literature was being allowed to die out, in contrast to Samoa where every trifling incident inspired a new epic. The Marquesans were apathetic and listless and bothered to dress up only when a Western ship called; the rest of the time they sought solace in opium.²⁰

The whole venture is based around a complex series of corrupt acts: the three beachcombers are engaged in writing home in a dishonest attempt to convince their respective families that they are well and enjoying success in the islands when Davis is offered command of the schooner; the *Farallone* is tainted by a serious disease; she has been

mishandled by a drunken captain and has ‘washed up’ on Tahiti, only to be taken charge of by another unworthy figure. The association of human weakness and disease operates as an extended metaphor throughout the opening section of the novel (the first sentence of ‘Trio’ alludes to Europeans spreading disease in the South Seas) and makes clear Stevenson’s belief in the presence of fallen man. Davis is given the opportunity to reverse the fortunes of all three, but the existence of a choice between legitimate business and criminality is all but illusory. Davis has already concocted a scheme to steal the *Farallone*, which he outlines to Herrick, citing a notorious pair of latter day pirates as a precedent:

‘Plain Dutch,’ replied the captain. ‘I’m going to own that schooner. It’s nothing new; it’s done every year in the Pacific. Stephens stole a schooner the other day, didn’t he? Hayes and Pease stole vessels all the time. And it’s the making of the crowd of us. See here, you think of that cargo. Champagne! Why, it’s like it was put up on purpose. In Peru we’ll sell that liquor off the pier-head, and the schooner after it, if we can find a fool to buy her; and then light out for the mines. If you’ll back me up, I stake my life I’ll carry it through.’ [TET, 28]

William Hayes and Ben Pease were American ‘pirates’ who stole ships, traded in slaves and committed fraud in the Pacific during the 1860s and 1870s and were the role models for Davis’s planned theft of the schooner.

It is important to note that this scheme is Davis’s and not a group decision. Herrick is appalled by the idea and his attempts to dissuade Davis from following it through, preferring instead the uncertainty associated with a legitimate landfall in Australia, indicate either a residual respect for the law or fear of capture. Whatever Herrick’s motivation for objecting to the scheme may be, the voyage is dishonest, it is the

equivalent of the historical ship-stealing of Hayes and Pease, and it is, perhaps, a metaphor for the Imperial project.

Herrick's initial inclination to have nothing to do with Davis's plan weakens under the weight of advocacy Davis brings to bear, most particularly when he suggests to Herrick that he can have little love for his family at home if he cannot understand Davis's motivation for carrying through the proposal to steal the *Farallone*. The suspicion that Herrick is a 'hollow man' is exacerbated by his suggestion of suicide: the refusal to seek a pragmatic solution, however morally ambivalent, typifies Herrick's Hamlet-like inactivity. He postures rather than acts, and his debilitating weakness needs Davis's external prompting to force him to face up to the reality of his situation: Herrick requires a strong figure by him in order to amass any amount of conviction. A contemporary critic identified this weakness in Herrick and offered the following analysis:

Herrick, the University man, who carries his tattered Virgil in his pocket to remind him of what he once was, is merely weak, not wicked, but his weakness is of that despicable sort which forfeits not only the respect of others, but self-respect as well, and makes a man an outcast and a pariah.²¹

Herrick's need for a talisman from the past to remind him of who he is, rather than what he was, is significant: because he is effectively isolated from his societal roots, any reference point is of vital importance. He is the metaphorical embodiment of the island in the second part of the novel, uncharted, remote and detached from the general discourse of the others. Herrick's reluctance to face up to his predicament enables Davis to persuade him towards accepting the deal and agreeing to steal the schooner despite his earlier misgivings. Herrick's resistance has all but

evaporated before Davis puts the decision beyond all doubt in his final, and successful appeal:

‘I’ll prophesy if you like,’ said the captain, with renewed vigour. ‘Refuse this, because you think yourself too honest, and before a month’s out you’ll be jailed for a sneak-thief. I give you the word fair. I can see it, Herrick, if you can’t: you’re breaking down. Don’t think, if you refuse this chance, that you’ll go on doing the evangelical; you’re about through with your stock, and before you know where you are, you’ll be right out on the other side. No it’s either this for you, or else it’s Caledonia. I bet you never were there, and saw those white, shaved men, in their dust clothes and straw hats, prowling around in gangs in the lamplight at Noumea; they look like wolves, and they look like preachers, and they look like the sick; Huish is a daisy to the best of them. Well, there’s your company. They’re waiting for you, Herrick, and you got to go; and that’s a prophecy.’ [TET, 30]

Herrick agrees to stand by Davis and the two depart to inform Huish of the plan. The irony is that the ‘bad man’ is not party to the initial scheming yet it is he whom Davis suggests will ‘Jump at it!’ [31] The imagery which distinguishes Davis’s final appeal to Herrick uses the bleak ‘whiteness’ which recurs throughout the text: white and light have a different value, one which subverts conventional symbolism within which light has associations with innocence and purity. In *The Ebb Tide*, as in *Heart of Darkness* they represent threat and danger in addition to obscuring rather than elucidating the path ahead.

New Caledonia was captured by the French in 1864 and became a penal colony soon after. It was renowned for its harsh regime and its reputation spread among the islands of the South Seas: Davis’s description is sufficient to persuade Herrick to concur with his plan. The ‘white, shaved men’ symbolise disease and Stevenson’s correlation of ‘white’ and ‘sick’ in this passage yet again emphasises the continuing metaphor of disease-spreading Europeans. Here though, the connection is made with criminal behaviour: the inhabitants of Noumea are white, sick

and criminal and they represent a multiple threat to the peoples of the South Pacific. Once more, Stevenson emphasises the irony of the situation: the ‘evangelising’ whites, the spreaders of ‘civilisation’ are to be found in jails, ailing and atavistically preoccupied with survival. Patrick Brantlinger, writing about the penal colony history of Australia, makes the following observation:

In 1797 London magistrate Patrick Colquhoun wrote that “transportation to an unknown region, inhabited by savages, and placed at such a remote distance from England, would exhibit this species of punishment in a light so terrific, as to prove the means of preventing crimes.” In one of his reports on the penal colonies J.T. Bigge later wrote: “Transportation to New South Wales is intended as a severe Punishment...and must be rendered an Object of real Terror.” [RD, 112]

Apparently, the London magistrate rather over-estimated the efficacy of transportation as a deterrent. Stevenson, widely travelled as he was, clearly knew of the penal colony at New Caledonia and used its powerful imagery to effect a change in Herrick’s attitude in the interplay with Davis.

The theme of diseased Europeans is once again foregrounded in ‘The Yellow Flag’, the pivotal chapter in the ‘Trio’ section. Stevenson emphasises the pilot’s anxiety to be clear of the vessel and any potential risk to health. The association is made between the corruption of the proposed venture and actual disease, in this case highly contagious and virulent smallpox. However, alongside the physical sickness that affects the schooner *Farallone*, Stevenson juxtaposes a metaphorical sickness that begins to spread among the trio, debilitating a working relationship and pre-figuring the open conflict of later sections in the text. The uneasiness that filters into the relationship between Herrick, Davis and

Huish itself resembles the early stages of an illness, threatening yet not fully developed. The apportioning of tasks by Davis, in his role as captain, serves to increase the sense of unease and Herrick, in particular, reinforces the impression of 'foot soldier' as he struggles to accept responsibility in the role of watch-keeper.

The contrast between Herrick and Davis is remarkable and underscores Herrick's nature. Herrick's indecisiveness and passivity is marked: things happen to Herrick, he does nothing to make them happen and so is without the potency to structure his own destiny. The impression of the 'hollow man' is sustained and the sense that Herrick is both literally and metaphorically afloat without a rudder is central to the argument that he demonstrates links to the protagonist in a proto-Modernist text. The lack of clear direction coupled to an uneasiness about the Imperial project, as he is implicated in it in his small, yet significant way, marks Herrick out as a forerunner of the central figures in the novels of predicament of the modern period. This observation is of vital importance in advancing the argument that, in *The Ebb Tide*, Stevenson has developed the devices of adventure fiction, of romance, and has focused his attention on a subject requiring a different treatment. The lost soul, unsure of a fixed position in the world he occupies, is central to Modernism. Herrick embodies that sense of dislocation to be found in the works of Hemingway, Fitzgerald and Beckett. Stevenson constructs this narrative of a modern figure alongside that of the dissolute sea-captain, a vestige of conventional adventure fiction were he not compromised by the grime of his past. Significantly, Davis, too, is dislocated in the sense that he has only the on-

going fraud to occupy him: a rather obvious case of the Devil making work for idle hands. The theft of the *Farallone* propels the trio on a course of action of which Davis is the principal architect, Huish an enthusiastic fellow-traveller, and Herrick the reluctant accomplice. Herrick is the archetypal outsider, the character type that would become a recurring trope in the fiction of the early twentieth century, but Huish and Davis, as symbols of the negative influence of the Europeans, also have special significance in this important text. The prevailing metaphor of disease continues to haunt the crew of the schooner once it has left shore. Once under sail, the *Farallone* may be free of the epidemic on the beach, but the yellow flag, even after it is lowered from the masthead, continues to haunt the *kanaka* crew's imagination. As a crewman jumps overboard from the rail of the ship and swims for landfall: Davis's reaction is instantaneous:

'Steady as she goes,' the captain cried, relinquishing the wheel to Huish. The next moment he was forward in the midst of the Kanakas, belaying-pin in hand.

'Anybody else for shore?' he cried, and the savage trumpeting of his voice, no less than the ready weapon in his hand, struck fear in all. Stupidly they stared after their escaped companion, whose black head was visible upon the water, steering for the land. And the schooner meanwhile slipt like a racer through the pass and met the long sea of the open ocean with a souse of spray.

'Fool that I was not to have a pistol ready!' exclaimed Davis. 'Well, we go to sea short-handed, we can't help that. You have a lame watch of it, Mr Hay.'

'I don't see how we are to get along,' said Herrick.

'Got to,' said the captain. 'No more Tahiti for me.'

Both turned instinctively and looked astern. The fair island was unfolding mountain top on mountain top; Eimeo, on the port board, lifted her splintered pinnacles; and still the schooner raced to the open sea.

'Think!' cried the captain, with a gesture, 'yesterday morning I danced for my breakfast like a poodle dog.' [TET, 37]

Such is the nature of this text that even at the point when Davis *appears* to have resuscitated his career, the reality is that he is merely in temporary suspension. His apparent assumption of command is an illusion

fuelled by *hubris* and based only on the plan to secure stability by stealing the *Farallone*. In short, Davis is no more competent to have command of the schooner than he is able to ‘sail the ship’ of his life. The illusional nature of *The Ebb Tide*, an important facet of its proto-Modernist construction, is further emphasised in the chapter entitled ‘The Cargo of Champagne’.

As a metaphor for the Imperial project, the cargo of the *Farallone* is both powerful and persuasive. The passage chosen by Davis to reach a market for the contraband cargo is by way of the Dangerous Archipelago: a notoriously difficult sea area in French Polynesia. Fully aware of the potential navigational dangers, Davis instructs Herrick to be particularly careful while keeping the course. Here Stevenson alerts the reader to the suspicion that Davis’s conversion from drunkard to responsible captain is illusory. Herrick has no experience of seamanship and by his own admission he is a ‘landsman’. It is highly improbable that any fastidious master mariner would entrust the safety of his vessel and crew to someone such as Herrick who has had no instruction in the sailing and navigation of a vessel like the *Farallone*. On one level, the lack of proper navigation and subsequent loss of direction is essential to the development of the narrative but, on another level, the framework of the text itself resembles the subject matter, there are no certainties and no closure is suggested. It is as if the text itself questions and unsettles established assumptions and certainties. The text avoids reaching a destination and this represents an elaboration of the process Stevenson had embarked upon in ‘The Beach of Falesá’. The symbolic significance of loss of direction links to the novel

of predicament in which the possibility of conventional denouement is denied.

The present study is informed by the wider significance of modernism within the framework of Empire and the extent to which the dawning realisation of the unwholesome nature of the Imperial project impacts upon writers such as Stevenson and Conrad. The sense of doubt in the morality of Empire found in the texts under consideration here is new and disturbing and, perhaps tentatively seeking a new direction, Stevenson recognises the accuracy of the metaphor of the ship attempting the dangerous passage.

The voyage, already perilous because of the natural dangers of sea conditions and reefs, is further compromised by Davis's 'fall'. Having assured Herrick that he would remain sober, the captain cannot maintain his promise once exposed to his 'demon':

'What's this? Where did that come from?' asked the captain.

'It's fizz, and it came from the after-'old, if you want to know,' said Huish, and drained his mug.

'This'll never do!' exclaimed Davis, the merchant seaman's horror of breaking into cargo showing incongruously forth on board that stolen ship. 'There was never any good came of games like that.'

'You byby! Said Huish. 'A fellow would think (to 'ear him) we were on the square!³² And look 'ere, you've put this job up 'ansomely for me, 'aven't you? I'm to go on deck and steer while you two sit and guzzle, and I'm to go by a nickname, and got to call you "sir" and "mister". Well, you look here, my bloke: I'll have fizz *ad lib*, or it won't wash. I tell you that. And you know mighty well, you ain't got any man-of-war to signal to now.'

Davis was staggered. 'I'd give fifty dollars this had never happened,' he said weakly.

'Well, it 'as 'appened, you see,' returned Huish. 'Try some: it's devilish good.'

The Rubicon was crossed without another struggle. The captain filled a mug and drank. [TET, 39]

Stevenson appositely uses the metaphor of 'crossing the Rubicon' to indicate that the narrative must follow another course entirely. Once again, the symbols are established in the mind of the reader: the sea, and

its association with death and re-birth, is significant and the equation of drink and dissolution and the corruptive influence of the whites is further emphasised. The timing of Davis's 'fall', or at least the first stumbling steps that propel him towards his collapse, prefigures his subsequent conversion at the hands of Attwater. Davis having started to drink will not be able to stop and the likelihood of a repetition of his disastrous handling of the *Sea Ranger* is now a real threat. The venture, never secure given the nature of the characters involved, already seems doomed and the anticipation of failure gains momentum from this point onward:

Herrick sat inert and silent. It was impossible, after these months of hopeless want to smell the rough, high-spiced sea victuals without lust, and his mouth watered with desire of the champagne. It was no less impossible to have assisted at the scene between Huish and the captain, and not to perceive, with sudden bluntness, the gulf wherein he had fallen. He was a thief among thieves. He said it to himself. He could not touch the soup. If he had moved at all, it must have been to leave the table, throw himself overboard and drown - an honest man. [TET, 39-40]

Herrick's self-deception is remarkable. He has already admitted to an inability to act to end his own life, yet here once more he suggests suicide as the only solution to his predicament. It is made obvious in this repetition of an earlier failure that Herrick has no self-knowledge and that his *persona* is re-created in terms of literary projection, be it from Horace, Virgil or indeed any other source. The voyage has hardly begun but there are sufficiently strong indications that it will be hampered by Davis's inability to insist on standards of discipline; Huish having already won the first round, Davis and Herrick follow his disastrous example and the project is set to fail. With champagne taken, both Davis and Herrick pontificate on the reasons why the poor do not become robbers and conclude that they themselves have been pulled up just as they reached the

limits of their endurance. This, of course, avoids the issue of the theft of the vessel and, replete with food, Herrick under Davis's instruction, settles down to the task of sailing the ship. Stevenson has, however, succeeded in undermining the image of a merchant ship as a legitimate trading agent, upholding the traditions of seafarers and in the process obtaining a reputation for integrity and courage. Here, Stevenson once again departs from the traditional portrayal of mariners in adventure fiction: there are no heroes in Stevenson's Pacific fiction, only types such as Randall and Davis. The very means by which the imperialist powers came to gain a foothold in the trade around the Pacific islands, the merchant ships, is associated with disease, dishonesty and drunkenness.

Further incidents of dissent between Huish and Davis, arising because of the former's unwillingness to accord Davis his place as captain, create an impression of incipient anarchy which may break out at any moment. The tension is almost tangible at these points and, again, creates a sense of foreboding regarding the outcome of the venture. Herrick, as ever sensitive to any negative atmosphere between the three asks Davis if there is a problem between him and Huish:

‘That’s a nasty little beast, that’s a biter’, replied the captain, shaking his head. ‘But so long as you and me hang in, it don’t matter.’

Herrick lay down in the weather alleyway; the night was cloudless, the movement of the ship cradled him, he was oppressed besides by the first generous meal after so long a time of famine; and he was recalled from deep sleep by the voice of Davis singing out: ‘Eight Bells!’ [TET, 42]

The collapse into drunkenness entered into by Davis and Huish is counterpointed by the responsibility demonstrated by Uncle Ned and the rest of the *kanaka* crew. They continue to sail the vessel safely and competently as the captain and Huish approach insensibility. In this

episode, Stevenson appears to draw straightforward comparisons between the whites and the *kanakas* that do not flatter the 'civilised' whites, once again emphasising the corrosive nature of their influence.

Stevenson had followed a passage through the Paumotus, similar to that attempted by Davis and the *Farallone*, during the 1888 cruise on board the *Casco* under the command of Captain Otis. He emphasises the difficulty of local navigation in the following extract from *In the South Seas*:

The rest of us were grouped at the port anchor davit, staring with no less assiduity, but with far less hope on the obscure horizon. Islands we beheld in plenty, but they were of 'such stuff as dreams are made on,' and vanished at a wink, only to appear in other places; and by and by not only islands, but refulgent and revolving lights began to stud the darkness; light houses of the mind or of the wearied optic nerve, solemnly shining and winking as we passed. At length the mate himself despaired, scrambled on board again from his unrestful perch, and announced that we had missed our destination. He was the only man of practice in these waters, our sole pilot, shipped for that end at Tai-o-hae. If he declared we had missed Takaroa, it was not for us to quarrel with the fact, but, if we could, to explain it. We had certainly run down our southing. Our canted wake upon the sea and our somewhat drunken-looking course upon the chart both testified with no less certainty to an impetuous westward current. We had no choice but to conclude we were again set down to leeward; and the best we could do was to bring the *Casco* to the wind, keep a good watch, and expect morning.

[ItSS, 142-43]

The memory of the 1888 voyage may provide the background for the ill-fated passage of the *Farallone* and several parallels surface to make such a reading possible. It is perhaps sufficient to the purposes of this study to state that the real difficulties encountered in navigating the atolls of the South Pacific are given a metaphorical or symbolic significance in *The Ebb Tide*.

Stevenson describes a descent into utter incapability as Herrick takes his turn at the wheel. Davis's call for Uncle Ned to bring his concertina aft

signals the start of the process as Davis and Huish uncork another bottle of champagne:

The schooner steered very easy; and Herrick watching the moon-whitened sails, was overpowered by drowsiness. A sharp report from the cabin startled him: a third bottle had been opened; and Herrick remembered the *Sea Ranger* and Fourteen Island Group. [TET, 42]

Herrick's shortcomings are apparent in his inability to record the ship's progress and his learning is of little practical value to him in this predicament. His misgivings concerning the developing situation on board the *Farallone* prove to be well-founded as Huish and Davis remain below drinking until Herrick is relieved at the end of his watch by Uncle Ned. Herrick's incompetence is once again apparent: having been instructed to keep a record of the ship's progress for the purposes of navigation by dead-reckoning, Herrick instead lapses into a reverie so that by the watch's end he has no record of their progress to date.

In a passage that highlights the ill-founded nature of the venture (not one of the participants is fit for the project) Stevenson gives insights into the mindset of Herrick. He is forced to fill up the slate by guesswork so as to cover up his inattention: Davis had instructed him to 'mind the ship's course, and keep your slate to half a point' [41]. Herrick should have kept the ship within half a compass point of the calculated course because in the absence of a record of progress it becomes impossible to establish how close the *Farallone* is to the calculated course. The loss of direction on the chart is mirrored by the descent into chaos predicated upon the behaviour of the Captain and the Steward. Characteristically, Herrick castigates himself for the lapse and vows to avoid repetition. The situation onboard

further deteriorates with Davis and Huish embarked upon a drinking session:

The first evening set the model for those that were to follow. Two cases of champagne scarce lasted the four and twenty hours, and almost the whole was drunk by Huish and the captain. Huish seemed to thrive on the excess; he was never sober, yet never wholly tipsy; the food and the sea air had soon healed him of his disease, and he began to lay on flesh. But with Davis things went worse. In the drooping, unbuttoned figure that sprawled all day upon the lockers, tippling and reading novels, in the fool who made of the evening watch a public carouse on the quarter-deck, it would have been hard to recognise the vigorous seaman of Papeete roads. He kept himself reasonably well in hand till he had taken the sun and yawned and blotted through his calculations; but from the moment he rolled up the chart, his hours were passed in slavish self-indulgence or in hoggish slumber. Every other branch of his duty was neglected, except maintaining a stern discipline about the dinner table. Again and again, Herrick would hear the cook called aft, and see him running with fresh tins or carrying away again a meal that had been totally condemned. And the more the captain became sunk in drunkenness, the more delicate his palate showed itself. [TET, 44-5]

The narrator expresses the stinging irony articulated by Herrick, further establishing the narrative voice as that of a well-educated and socially similar type to Herrick and Stevenson himself. There are of course, similarities between the author and Herrick, as has been suggested earlier, and the tone of disapproval fits in with Stevenson's frequent association of alcohol and degeneration. This may be linked to guilt about his own relatively dissolute life as a young man in Edinburgh in the 1870s. Certainly, Stevenson gave up both alcohol and tobacco in May or June of 1893, and subsequently seems to have held only negative thoughts about drink. What is clear is that the behaviour of Huish and Davis alarms Herrick who determines to do all he can to prevent the endeavour coming to a disastrous conclusion; a hope that is without foundation given Herrick's incompetence.

The *Farallone* staggers across the Pacific as her captain staggers across the deck in a drunken dance of excess; Davis abandons his duties except

to rig a bosun's chair over the side to paint out the ship's name, but even that task is abandoned in lassitude. The 'incongruous patch of colour' [45] left by Davis on the stern of the vessel resembles a blemish and far from rendering the vessel anonymous as the captain had intended, draws attention to it. In addition, Davis abandons Herrick to the navigation of the ship and insists that they are engaged in fair weather sailing and therefore in no need of dead reckoning. Herrick's attempt to put the incompetence of his past behind him is compromised by a man who is incapable of following through the same process: Davis's veneer of competence has evaporated in the haze of alcohol. The *Farallone* has effectively become a metaphor for self-indulgence and degeneration and, with Davis drunk once again, bound for failure. Herrick, nearing desperation, tries to persuade Davis to check the charts and to confirm the ship's position by dead reckoning, sensibly arguing that they may not continue to enjoy good weather and so navigate solely by the sun. Davis's response to Herrick's request for help is an indicator of how far his dereliction has advanced:

'We mayn't get it [the sun] always though,' objected Herrick. 'And you told me yourself you weren't sure of the chronometer.'

'Oh, there ain't no flies on the chronometer!' cried Davis.

'Oblige me so far, captain,' said Herrick stiffly. 'I am anxious to keep this reckoning which is a part of my duty; I do not know what to allow for current, nor how to allow for it. I am too inexperienced; and I beg of you to help me.'

'Never discourage zealous officer,' said the captain, unrolling the chart again, for Herrick had taken him over his day's work, and while he was still partly sober. 'Here it is: look for yourself: anything from west to west-no'thwest, and anyways from five to twenty-five miles. That's what the Am'ralty chart says: I guess you don't expect to get ahead of your own Britishers?'

'I am trying to do my duty, Captain Brown,' said Herrick, with a dark flush, 'and I have the honour to inform you that I don't enjoy being trifled with.'

'What in thunder do you want?' roared Davis 'Go and look at the blamed wake. If you're trying to do your duty, why don't you go and do it? I guess it's no business of mine to go and stick my head over the ship's rump. I guess it's yours. And I'll tell you what it is, my fine fellow, I'll trouble you

not to come the dude over me. You're insolent, that's what's wrong with you. Don't you crowd me, Mr Herrick, Esquire.'

Herrick tore up his papers, threw them on the floor, and left the cabin.

'He's turned a bloomin' swot, ain't he?' sneered Huish.

'He thinks himself too good for his company, that's what ails Herrick, Esquire,' raged the captain.' He thinks I don't understand when he comes the heavy swell. Won't sit down with us, won't he? Won't say a civil word? I'll serve the son of a gun as he deserves. By God, Huish, I'll show him whether he's too good for John Davis!' [TET 45-6]

To all intents and purposes from this point on, the ship has lost its way and by implication, so have Herrick, Huish and Davis, both literally and, more importantly, metaphorically. Davis has gone to sea without a 'Bowditch' that is to say a copy of Nathaniel Bowditch's *The American Practical Navigator*, as important a navigational aid as charts or rudder. Davis abandoned that particular navigational essential after losing the *Sea Ranger* and seems bound to repeat the exercise with the *Farallone*. The metaphorical sense of being afloat on a vast sea of life without any moral guide is echoed here; the omission will be ironically rectified when the three come face to face with Attwater on his uncharted island in the middle of this wasteland. Herrick's almost neurotic insistence on accuracy with regard to the progress of the *Farallone* may have a more prosaic source given Stevenson's knowledge of the complexities of navigating around the Dangerous Archipelago, having been there on the *Casco*. Ever after, Stevenson confessed to bewilderment at how Captain Otis had negotiated that most difficult passage, although his memory seems to have been selective as the description of that voyage given earlier shows. If there is any merit in this observation, it may well further support the argument that Herrick is a projection of certain aspects of Stevenson's perception of himself at the time of writing *The Ebb Tide*.

Stevenson effects an important association in terms of the 'fall' of the whites. As Herrick becomes increasingly distanced from his co-conspirators, the *kanaka* hand, Uncle Ned leads his comrades in a religious service and the moment is moving for the Englishman:

Upon the Sunday each brought forth his separate Bible - for they were all men of alien speech, even to each other, and Sally Day communicated with his mates in English only; each read or made believe to read, his chapter, Uncle Ned with spectacles on nose; and they would all join together in the singing of missionary hymns. It was thus a cutting reproof to compare the islanders and the whites aboard the *Farallone*. Shame ran in Herrick's blood to remember what employment he was on, and to see these poor souls - and even Sally Day, the child of cannibals, in all likelihood a cannibal himself - so faithful to what they knew of good. The fact that he was held in grateful favour by these innocents served like blinders to his conscience, and there were times when he was inclined, with Sally Day, to call himself a good man.
[TET, 48]

The equation of good and worth and innocence with 'native' recurs again in this extract; the narrative voice again evidences resemblances of an autobiographical nature and reflects the mutual respect which existed between Stevenson and his workers at Vailima. At the time of writing *The Ebb Tide* he had more than usual reason to be convinced of the attraction of the indigenous way of life to that of the competing European powers. The powerful metaphor of the opposed cultures onboard the *Farallone* reflects the author's preoccupation with developments in the Pacific throughout 1892-93 outlined earlier in this study.

Stevenson's portrayal of the diverse races of South Seas islanders as more co-operative and coherent as a group onboard the vessel than the three whites would seem to support the view that in this text he has abandoned any vestige of belief in the power of whites to bring harmony to the islands; a sense of shame by association is apparent in the extent to

which both the narrative voice, and the flawed Herrick, represent Stevenson's views on European imperialism.

At the conclusion of the religious ceremony, Uncle Ned exhorts Herrick to rest following his marathon stint at the helm, assuring him that the *kanaka* crew is capable of sailing the ship:

‘It’s no use, Uncle Ned,’ he replied. ‘I couldn’t sleep. I’m knocked over with all your goodness.’

‘Ah, no call me Uncle Ned no mo’!’ cried the old man. ‘No my name! My name Taveeta, all-e-same Taveeta, King of Israel.’ [TET, 48]

In the midst of men forced to adopt aliases because of the nature of their activities in the present, and because of their notoriety in the past, ‘Uncle Ned’ asserts his right to his true name, David, ‘like the King of Israel.’ In an ironic subversion of the hegemony of whites, Stevenson establishes the erstwhile ‘Uncle Ned’ as the symbol of truth and honesty in the narrative and along with Sally Day, the son of cannibals, highlights the contrast between the internecine strife of the whites and the communal reliance of the Pacific islanders. The irony is compounded in the sense that ‘David’ is most assuredly a name given by missionaries and so not a ‘true’ name anyway. This very fact, however, emphasises the manner in which western influence assumes to interfere in native custom, even to the extent that whites should feel no compunction about re-naming Polynesians with Christian names arbitrarily chosen by missionaries.

Herrick’s reference to Sally Day as a son of cannibals is significant because of an earlier Stevenson essay in *In the South Seas*. Here Stevenson, describes ‘Long-Pig - A Cannibal High Place’. The European aversion to anthropophagy was well-established by the time Stevenson

arrived in the South Seas in the late 1880s, but in his essay on the subject Stevenson makes several telling points:

Nothing more strongly arouses our disgust than cannibalism, nothing so surely unmortars a society; nothing, we might plausibly argue, will so harden and degrade the minds of those that practise it. And yet we ourselves make much the same appearance in the eyes of the Buddhist and the vegetarian. We consume the carcasses of creatures of like appetites, passions and organs with ourselves; we feed on babes, though not our own; and the slaughter-house resounds daily with screams of pain and fear. [ItSS, 90-1]

Stevenson, while acknowledging the abhorrence of the practice of cannibalism felt by Europeans is swift to point out the need for tolerance where cultural disparities occlude. Later in the same essay, Stevenson argues that the indigenous culture requires protection from potentially hostile, outside, influences, citing European cultural values as different rather than better:

Upon such 'dread foundations' the life of the European reposes, and yet the European is among the less cruel of races. The paraphernalia of murder, the preparatory brutalities of his existence, are all hid away; an extreme sensibility reigns upon the surface; and ladies will faint at the recital of one tithe of what they daily expect of their butchers. Some will even be crying out upon me in their hearts for the coarseness of this paragraph. And so with the island cannibals. They were not cruel; apart from this custom, they are a race of the most kindly; rightly speaking, to cut a man's flesh after he is dead is far less hateful than to oppress him whilst he lives; and even the victims of their appetite were gently used in life and suddenly and painlessly despatched at last. In island circles of refinement it was doubtless thought bad taste to expatiate on what was ugly in the practice.

Cannibalism is traced from end to end of the Pacific, from the Marquesas to New Guinea, from New Zealand to Hawaii, here in the lively haunt of its exercise, there by scanty but significant survivals. [ItSS, 92-3]

Stevenson's matter-of-fact style indicates his belief that tolerance in such matters is a pre-requisite of whites and islanders living side-by-side: it is, he postulates, simply a matter of different value-systems, not a question of good and evil. Stevenson concedes the difficulty in expecting a late-nineteenth-century audience to accept the necessity of tolerance in the case of such an emotive issue:

To consider it too closely is to understand, if not to excuse, these fervours of self-righteous old ship-captains, who would man their guns, and open fire in passing, on a cannibal island. (ItSS, 101.)

Central to the argument that Stevenson requires re-assessment alongside Conrad as an early Modernist critic of Empire is the idea that he counters a tradition that seemed to have its focus on making the case for colonialism more strongly as belief in the morality of the Imperial project weakened.

The narrative as it concerns the debauched behaviour of Davis and Huish is paralleled in Uncle Ned's account of the *Farallone's* voyage under Wiseman and Wishart, her previous master and mate. The heavy irony in the names, 'Wise-man' and 'Wise-heart' underpins Stevenson's insistence that the whites do not necessarily bring to the Pacific either wisdom or compassion. According to the old man, the ship had barely cleared the coast of the United States before captain and mate embarked on a bout of drinking similar to that now being indulged in by Huish and Davis. Following weeks of uncharted progress across the Pacific, the native crewmen were terrified and having eventually made landfall on a small island Wiseman and Wishart landed in the ship's boat. In a very short time they discovered that the island, in the Dangerous Archipelago, was disease-ridden and with all haste they returned to their ship. Neither Wiseman nor Wishart could say with any certainty where they were and Uncle Ned suggests that at least Davis is a better captain because he: 'Take-a sun all-e-time'[50]. Herrick is far from convinced that Davis is any better than his predecessors and believes the vessel to be damned. Herrick's belief in the project, like the cargo itself, evaporates rapidly. He

does not, however, become despondent but rather he assumes responsibility for the ship while Huish and Davis are engaged in a further bout of drinking, establishing another geometric arrangement within the trio. As the voyage passes in a period of relative calm both in a meteorological sense, and in terms of relations between Huish, Davis and Herrick, Stevenson releases the tension in the narrative until the schooner sails into a squall, and with it, real danger:

The *Farallone* lay already far over; the sky was obscured with misty scud; and from the windward an ominous squall came flying up, broadening and blackening as it rose.

Fear thrilled in Herrick's vitals. He saw death hard by; and if not death, sure ruin. For if the *Farallone* lived through the coming squall, she must surely be dismasted. With that, their enterprise was at an end, and they themselves bound prisoners to the very evidence of their crime. The greatness of the peril and his own alarm sufficed to silence him. Pride, wrath and shame raged without issue in his mind; and he shut his teeth and folded his arms close.

[TET, 51]

The apocalyptic nature of the deteriorating weather mirrors the condition onboard ship as Davis and Huish lay into the ship's cargo, drinking case after case of champagne. The distinction drawn by Stevenson earlier in the episode is reinforced as Davis is seemingly untroubled by the sea state and rising wind and his reaction to the coming storm contrasts alarmingly with that of the landsman, Herrick:

The captain sat in the boat to windward, bellowing orders and insults, his eyes glazed, his face deeply congested: a bottle set between his knees, a glass in his hand half empty. His back was to the squall, and he was at first intent upon the setting of the sail. When that was done, and the great trapezium of canvas had begun to draw and to trail the lee-rail of the *Farallone* level with the foam, he laughed out an empty laugh, drained his glass, sprawled back among the lumber in the boat, and fetched out a crumpled novel. [TET, 51]

Davis appears to relive the events leading up to the loss of the *Sea Ranger* and sets himself in the ship's lifeboat with his back to the coming storm. His adoption of a 'crumpled novel' in the face of the advancing storm is

indicative of his incapacity to command the vessel in an appropriate and safe manner: he has learned nothing from his earlier disaster. The gross nature of his disregard for the men onboard the schooner is predicated either upon huge arrogance or upon neglect brought about by self-indulgence; in either event Davis is headed for a fall. Stevenson creates an impression of rising tension by creating impressionistic flashes of changing colour which reflect the threatening storm:

Herrick watched him, and his indignation glowed red-hot. He glanced to windward where the squall already whitened the near sea and already heralded its coming with a singular and dismal sound. He glanced at the steersman, and saw him clinging to the spokes with a face of a sickly blue. He saw the crew were running to their stations without orders. And it seemed as if something broke in his brain: and the passion of anger, so long restrained, so long eaten in secret, burst suddenly loose and filled and shook him like a sail. He stepped across to the captain and smote his hand heavily on the drunkard's shoulder.

'You brute,' he said in a voice that tottered, 'look behind you!'

'Wha's that?' cried Davis, bounding in the boat and upsetting the champagne.

'You lost the *Sea Ranger* because you were a drunken sot,' said Herrick. 'Now you're going to lose the *Farallone*. You're going to drown here the same way as you drowned others, and be damned. And your daughter shall walk the streets, and your sons be thieves like their father.'

For the moment, the words struck the captain white and foolish. 'My God!' he cried, looking at Herrick as upon a ghost, 'my God, Herrick!'

[TET, 51-2]

Stevenson uses the metaphor of deteriorating weather conditions to directly represent the increasingly stormy relationship between the drinkers and the sober Herrick. As the squall strikes the schooner, Davis is quickly brought to his senses and, while Herrick experiences a cathartic terror, he regains control of the *Farallone* and the danger of broaching and capsize is averted. Herrick is committed to the conversation Davis would rather avoid: the acceptance of his liability because of his drunkenness is given, but Herrick will not let it pass without confrontation and resignation from the post of mate, suggesting that Huish 'will make a

worthy first officer' [53] to Davis's captain. Herrick, by disassociating himself from the project, indicates a disgust with the endeavour that may, once again, be read as a powerful metaphor for Stevenson's increasing dismay in response to the colonial presence in the Pacific. In asserting his wish to be finished with Davis, Huish and the whole venture, Herrick elicits a promise from Davis to avoid alcohol for the duration of the voyage but his self-righteousness suggests a lack of self-knowledge regarding his own shortcomings. Davis, having been stung by Herrick's criticism, delivers a reply that deeply disturbs Herrick:

'You know what you said about my children? I want to tell you why it hit me so hard; I kind of think you'll feel bad about it too. It's about my little Adar. You hadn't ought to have quite said that - but of course I know you didn't know. She - she's dead, you see.'

'Why, Davis!' cried Herrick. 'You've told me a dozen times she was alive! Clear your head, man! This must be the drink.'

'No, *sir*,' said Davis. 'She's dead, right enough. Died of a bowel complaint. That was when I was away in the brig *Oregon*. She lies in Portland, Maine. "Adar, only daughter of Captain John Davis and Mariar his wife, aged five". I had a doll for her on board. I never took the paper off'n that doll, Herrick; it went down the way it was with the *Sea Ranger*, that day I was damned.' [TET, 55]

Herrick, stunned by Davis's revelation, feels a rising sense of terror: Davis appears to be unhinged and despite his assurances that he is rational, Herrick believes him to be insane. The opportunity for self-appraisal is apparently accepted by Davis but not, significantly, by Herrick whose impression of Davis as a caring father, if nothing else, is now proven false. Davis admits to having misled Herrick about Ada, his dead daughter. The combination of this lie, and the levels of deception structured on their own use of false names, and the abortive attempt by Davis to erase the *Farallone*'s name combine to further complicate the boundaries of truth and fiction. Herrick can no longer identify that which

is true and that which is false; furthermore, he is caught up in a narrative within a narrative which is increasingly inclined to take him further from fixed points of reference. In another important sense, the last vestige of respect Herrick has for Davis is threatened by this lie and Herrick recognises that as such lies begin to cohere about their enterprise, there is nothing that can be honourable about it. In a technical sense, Stevenson adopts a reflexive narrative that interrogates itself about the issue of the location of truth in the construct of a narrative. It is a question that functions both inside and outside the narrative: inside following Herrick's discovery of Davis's lie, and outside as Stevenson shifts the perspectives of narration to allow Davis to make the self-revelatory statement which de-stabilises Herrick.

The ultimate lie is exposed when Huish, disinclined to follow Davis's example and stop drinking, opens another bottle of champagne:

By this time the wire was open, the string was cut, the band of gilded paper was torn away; and Huish waited, mug in hand, expecting the usual explosion. It did not follow. He eased the cork with his thumb: still there was no result. At last he took the screw and drew it. It came out very easy and with scarce a sound.

'Ello!' said Huish, 'ere's a bad bottle.'

He poured some of the wine into the mug: it was colourless and still. He smelt and tasted it.

'W'y, wot's this?' he cried. 'It's water!'

If the voice of trumpets had suddenly sounded about the ship in the midst of the sea, the three men in the house could scarce have been more stunned than by this incident. The mug passed round; each sipped, each smelt of it; each stared at the bottle in its glory of gold paper as Crusoe may have stared at the footprint; and their minds were swift to fix upon a common apprehension. The difference between a bottle of champagne and a bottle of water is not great; between a shipload of one or the other lay the whole scale from riches to ruin. [TET, 56]

The whole purpose of the endeavour is undermined by yet another untruth: nothing is what it appears to be. Following an examination of the contents of the hold by the three whites, the discovery is made that the

upper layer of boxes contains champagne, much of which has already been consumed by Davis and Huish. However, the deeper stacked layers contain water in champagne bottles until, at last, the bottom layer is uncovered to show that these bottles have not even been disguised. The cargo is worthless.

Stevenson establishes a cross-roads in the text and sets up the climax to the first section of the novel: the (ad)venture is over, and abject failure is, apparently, the only possible outcome. However, another deception is planned in order to redress the effects of the cumulative deceptions that have dogged the beachcombers in their attempts to escape the Pacific. Stevenson indicates a precedent for the plan Davis intends to implement:

‘Well, my sons,’ pursued the captain, who seemed to have recovered his assurance, ‘Wiseman and Wishart were to be paid for casting away this old schooner and its cargo. We’re going to cast away the schooner right enough; and I’ll make it my private business to see that we get paid. What were W. and W. to get? That’s more’n I can tell. But W. and W. went into this business themselves, they were on the crook. Now *we’re* on the square, *we* only stumbled into it; and that merchant has just got to squeal, and I’m the man to see that he squeals good. No, *sir!* There’s more stuffing to this *Farallone* racket after all.’ [TET, 59]

The criminal purpose is therefore established and the notorious Wishart and Wiseman partnership is invoked to, perversely, underpin Davis’s suggestion that they come back into profit by sailing as close to a location where there is an American consul, scuttle the *Farallone* and make land in the ship’s boat. They can then be repatriated to the United States and claim the insurance from the owner on threat of exposure to the authorities for fraud. This corrupt scheme is the only chance the partners have of securing any gain for their efforts but it depends on their reaching Samoa, many days away from their last present position. Stevenson injects

tension into the narrative by revealing that the stores stock levels onboard the schooner are found to be dangerously low with insufficient supplies to make landfall in Samoa. Significantly the reason for the depleted stocks is over-consumption by Davis and Huish during their binge. With the lack of supplies, yet another self-inflicted wound, the last chance of salvation appears to have disappeared. Stevenson illustrates the racist nature of Davis's scapegoating of the *kanaka* crew and Herrick's opposition to it:

‘You will not lay a finger on the man,’ said Herrick. ‘The fault is yours and you know it.’ If you turn a savage loose in your store room, you know what to expect. I will not allow the man to be molested.’ [TET, 62]

The statement is revealing: Herrick is no egalitarian despite his education, and Stevenson gives an insight once again into the general disparagement of natives by their white overseers. Oddly, it is the brutal, uneducated Huish who states the case most accurately:

‘Well!’ drawled Huish. ‘You’re the plummy captain, ain’t you! You’re a blooming captain! Don’t you set up any of your chat to me, John Dyvis: I know you now, you ain’t more use than a bloomin’ dawl! Oh, you “don’t know”, don’t you? Oh, it “gets you”, do it? Oh, I dessay! W’y, weren’t you ‘owling for fresh tins every blessed day? ‘Ow often ‘ave I ‘eard you send the ‘ole bloomin’ dinner off and tell the man to chuck it in the swill-tub? And breakfast? Oh, my crikey! Breakfast for ten, and you ‘ollerin’ for more! And now you “can’t most tell”! Blow me, if it ain’t enough to make a man write an insultin’ letter to Gawd! You dror it mild, John Dyvis; don’t ‘andle me: I’m dyngerous.’ [TET, 62]

Stevenson raises several important points here. The waste implied by Davis's profligacy has reduced the chances of survival for all onboard the schooner. Greed such as Davis's threatens the success of the project and in an interesting metaphorical sense, Stevenson can be seen to view the different possibilities as they come together to create a complex moral problem. Davis may be read as a representation of the rapacious drive in the Imperial project and the force that will function to negate the

‘civilising’ influence of the white colonist. The incompetent Herrick, implicated also but more conscious of his failings, represents a more ambivalent participant in the Imperial project. The geometric shape of the narrative is altered once again as the partnership of Huish and Davis is undermined and the patterning alluded to earlier in this discussion can be seen to be dynamic. Herrick and Davis now expose Huish as the outsider and the cup of resentment now passes from Herrick to Huish. It is in the midst of this re-positioning of alliances that a *kanaka* crewman announces the sighting of land.

In a description laden with symbolic significance, Stevenson locates the trio, at the nadir of their misfortune, at some distance from a haze that may or may not indicate an island landfall. There is, however, nothing on the charts to indicate the presence of any land. Stevenson calls into question the validity of ‘authorities’ when Davis calls for a copy of *Findlay*²³ and there is an entry that is ambivalent. The ambivalence is important because it connects to the thematic issue of reliability: *Findlay* is of no more value, in terms of the certainties contained therein, than Herrick’s tattered copy of Virgil. One M. Delille gives reference points for an island in this vicinity as does Commander Matthews of *HMS Scorpion*, but the almanac goes on to say ‘this must be the same, if such an island exists, which is very doubtful and totally disbelieved by South Seas traders’ [64]. The physical description of the island exacerbates the uncertainty of the navigators:

But Uncle Ned contentedly pointed to a part of the horizon where a greenish, filmy iridescence could be discerned floating like smoke on the pale heavens.

Davis applied his glass to it, and then looked at the Kanaka.

‘Call that land?’ said he. ‘Well, it’s more than I do.’ [TET, 64]

Davis is proved wrong yet again. The old crewman has been around this seaway and recognises the signs of an island landfall with a lagoon. The reflection resembles that of a mirror’s surface and makes certainty difficult until the vessel is much closer. The recurring metaphor of obfuscatory light, the paradox of light and darkness that is such an important trope in *Heart of Darkness*, and discussed in the preceding chapter, is prefigured here in *The Ebb Tide*. The issue of perception and reality so important in the development of the Modernist text, either in fictive or visual art, is fore-grounded here.

The schooner sets course for the mirage and the uncertainty of the landfall is reflected in the uncertainties which preoccupy the three whites, once again nursing antipathies but now within different patterns of allegiance. The uncertainty that surrounds the decision to seek landfall foreshadows the increasingly complex moral decisions that will surface in ‘Quartette’.

In ‘The Pearl Fisher’, the opening section of the second part of *The Ebb Tide*, Stevenson again places the action in a liminal area. The island that appeared earlier as an insubstantial mirage on the horizon, that is to say on the edge of the unknown, is a paradise, but at first glance it is a deserted paradise. The mystery surrounding, firstly, the place and, secondly, the apparent lack of population increases the dramatic tension and coupled with the physical description of the island creates an other-worldly impression:

The isle - the undiscovered, the scarce-believed in - now lay before them and close aboard; and Herrick thought that never in his dreams had he beheld

anything more strange and delicate. The beach was excellently white, the continuous barrier of trees inimitably green; the land perhaps ten feet high, the trees thirty more. Every here and there, as the schooner coasted northward, the wood was intermitted; and he could see clear over the inconsiderable strip of land (as a man looks over a wall) to the lagoon within - and clear over that again to where the far side of the atoll prolonged its pencilling of trees against the morning sky. He tortured himself to find analogies. The isle was like the rim of a great vessel sunken in the waters; it was like the embankment of an annular railway grown upon with wood. So slender it seemed amidst the outrageous breakers, so frail and pretty, he would scarce have wondered to see it sink and disappear without a sound, and the waves close smoothly over its descent. [TET, 67-8]

So insubstantial is this island landfall that the metaphorical mirage it conjured from a distance is hardly evaporated by proximity to its concrete presence. The imagery of a near ethereal place is appropriate given the thematic shift that will narrow the focus on matters spiritual rather than material. It is yet another example of structural patterning collapsing into the thematic substance of the text: that is to say, the physical setting is subsumed into the metaphorical 'nature' of the subject matter. Conrad figures a similar correlation in the scene in *Victory* where Ricardo surveys the clearing looking for Heyst: the deserted, bleak clearing has a metaphorical equivalence in the emptiness within Ricardo, he is in Eliot's image, a 'hollow' man. The apparent lack of cohesion in *The Ebb Tide* is related, perhaps, to the diminution of certainty in a dynamically changing world. It should be stressed that the text is, of course, cohesive but within a structure different to that of conventional adventure writing. In terms of form then, it presents a challenge to readers more accustomed to standard figures and conclusive resolution and this may also have contributed to the text's negative reception.

In a reversal of common usage which is mirrored in *Heart of Darkness*, Stevenson continues to use the quality of light as a blinding agent. The

clearer the light, the greater the difficulty in seeing: this is of primary importance once again as a physical framework which is subsumed into the thematic process as the scene is set for the narrative's ultimate believer in Light and Truth, Attwater, to appear. The central importance of metaphor and symbol in *The Ebb Tide* is emphasised at this point. Interpretation of Attwater and his island at the symbolic level becomes crucial. Stevenson's text may be seen as a contribution to the early Modernist canon in this important sense. Attwater's island may, in turn, be interpreted as a paradise, indeed the following description and its impression on Herrick perhaps bears out that reading. However, it will be shown that it is a paradise lost, or more accurately, a paradise taken over or colonised. The logical extension of that view is to locate Attwater as the symbolic representation of the controlling power of Empire: its presiding genius. The man who appears to stand for Light and Truth, it will be argued, is in fact a corrupting spreader of disease and death. It will be shown that he functions as Stevenson's most powerful representation of the negative aspect of the Imperial project: he is deeply ruthless, deeply powerful, and deeply evil.

Before Attwater makes his first appearance however, Herrick experiences further sensory overload which exacerbates the impression of this island as a pre-lapsarian Eden:

Herrick stood transported. In the gratified lust of his eye, he forgot the past and the present; forgot that he was menaced by a prison on the one hand and starvation on the other; forgot that he was come to that island, desperately foraging, clutching at expedients. A drove of fishes, painted like the rainbow and billed like parrots, hovered up in the shadow of the schooner, and passed clear of it, and glinted in the submarine sun. They were beautiful like birds, and their silent passage impressed him like a strain of song. [TET, 69]

The exotic nature of the physical surroundings has a calming effect upon Herrick. Soothed by the beauty of the lagoon, he experiences for the first time in many months, a sense of catharsis. Rather than this exoticism functioning as a framework for, as Professor Fowler claims, a *roman d'aventure* ²⁴ it may well be argued that it emphasises the existential quality of Herrick's predicament and so shifts the framing discourse of Stevenson's text *from* adventure fiction rather than towards it. The exotic location is a key trope of adventure fiction, as Fowler argues, but the significance here is that Stevenson uses a conventional location within a new structure in order, perhaps, to suggest the limitations of conventional devices. It is because the island has a symbolic significance beyond that of conventional adventure fiction that it is central to the emphasis on non-literal language used by Stevenson in this text. The dynamically shifting geometric patterning of the characters in a relational arrangement that itself undercuts loyalties is also a departure from a more linear narrative structure.

The internalising process that follows from the sighting of the island is of importance and the geographical, or physical, location serves to conjure a particular response in Herrick. In the opening scenes of 'The Pearl Fisher' the overall effect is to prepare the entrance of Attwater and to ensure that Herrick will be attracted to the eccentric overseer. The ship has to navigate around the low shoreline of the lagoon before standing at the mouth of a bight within which lies a settlement: the light blinds and even a near sea-level margin obscures:

And suddenly the curtain was raised; they began to open out a haven, snugly elbowed there, and beheld, with an astonishment beyond words, the roofs of

men. The appearance, thus ‘instantaneously disclosed’ to those on the deck of the *Farallone*, was not that of a city, rather of a substantial country farm with its attendant hamlet: a long line of sheds and storehouses; apart, upon the one side, a deep-verandahed dwelling-house; on the other, perhaps a dozen native huts; a building with a belfry and some rude offer at architectural features that might be thought to mark it out for a chapel; on the beach in front, some heavy boats drawn up, and a pier of timber running forth into the burning shallows of the lagoon. From a flagstaff at the pier-head, the red ensign of England was displayed. Behind, about and over, the same tall grove of palms, which had masked the settlement in the beginning, prolonged its roof of tumultuous green fans, and tossed and ruffled overhead and sang its silver song all day in the wind. The place had the indescribable but unmistakable appearance of being in commission; yet there breathed from it a sense of desertion that was almost poignant, no human figure was to be observed going to and fro about the houses, and there was no sound of human industry or enjoyment. Only, on the top of the beach and hard by the flagstaff, a woman of exorbitant stature and as white as snow, was to be seen beckoning with uplifted arm. The second glance identified her as a piece of naval sculpture, the figurehead of a ship, that had long hovered and plunged into so many running billows, and was now brought ashore to be the ensign and presiding genius of that empty town. [TET, 69-70]

The contrast between the opening and closing images of this passage are striking, as the natural colours of the lagoon and its surrounding rim give way to ‘the red ensign of England’, the flag of the British mercantile marine, and the ‘leprous whiteness’ [70] of the figurehead. The contradiction between what is natural and what is unnatural is important. Stevenson places a figurehead in a position of prominence on the island; it is one of the first impressions established in the minds of the conspirators. The figurehead is an image of Britannia and it suggests a connection between trade and imperialism, especially given that the figurehead is more probably from a merchant, rather than a military ship. The location of the figurehead by the red ensign would bear out such a theory, if only, perhaps, in symbolic terms, and the presence of a white trader on the island may further substantiate such reasoning. Stevenson describes the scene in these terms:

The flag spoke for itself; it was no frayed and weathered trophy that had beaten itself to pieces on the post, flying over desolation; and to make

assurance stronger, there was to be descried in the deep shade of the verandah, a glitter of crystal and the fluttering of white napery. If the figurehead at the end of the pier, with its perpetual gesture and its leprous whiteness, reigned alone in that hamlet as it seemed to do, it could not have reigned long. [TET, 70]

Within the symbolic framework of *The Ebb Tide*, the figurehead is of especial significance. As a set of symbols, the flag and figurehead combine as emblems of Empire and amount to Attwater's declaration of ownership, ostensibly in the name of *Pax Britannica*. However, as Stevenson reveals, Attwater's objective is more personal, and once again, is connected to the Imperial project. Attwater is an efficient representative of the mindset that informs the characters of the trio: essentially motivated, as they are, by personal greed, only he has devised a profitable means by which to support himself on his island. Stevenson emphasises Attwater's complicity in the colonial endeavour by his deployment of a framework of symbolic significance based on these emblems. The symbolic significance is widened by the use of the phrase 'leprous whiteness' as if to link an emblem of Empire directly to disease in another out-working of a central theme.

The landfall is therefore imbued with multi-faceted images even before a single human occupant is observed; it is as if the stage is set for the island chief to make his appearance and when Attwater does indeed appear, the image of authority he possesses is consistent with a representative of Britannia's extended Empire. Attwater approaches the schooner and his disembodied voice is heard shouting an order to head for a berth by the pier:

The boat was manned with a couple of brown oarsmen in scanty kilts of blue. The speaker, who was steering, wore white clothes, the full dress of the tropics; a wide hat shaded his face; but it could be seen that he was of

stalwart size, and his voice sounded like a gentleman's. So much could be made out. It was plain, besides, that the *Farallone* had been descried some time before at sea, and the inhabitants were prepared for its reception.

[TET, 71]

The figure in the boat is dressed in brilliant white but is difficult to see in any detail: the inversion of the common value of light and dark is further extended; Attwater cannot be seen properly, but he exudes an aura of substance and considerable size. The significance of Attwater's size will be emphasised when the trio becomes the quartette, and as Attwater's domination of everything on the island becomes apparent to Herrick, Davis and even to the naturally rebellious Huish. Furthermore, the manner in which the trio automatically follows Attwater's instructions in the matter of berthing the *Farallone* indicates a natural authority that will hold sway even from the first moment of contact. Upon closer examination, their first impressions appear to be substantiated:

The boat was by that time forging alongside, and they were able at last to see what manner of man they had to do with. He was a huge fellow, six feet four in height and of a build proportionately strong, but his sinews seemed to be dissolved in a listlessness that was more than languor. It was only the eye that corrected this impression: an eye of an unusual mingled brilliancy and softness, sombre as coal, and with lights that outshone the topaz; an eye of unimpaired health and virility: an eye that bid you beware of the man's devastating anger. A complexion naturally dark had been tanned in the island to a hue hardly distinguishable from that of a Tahitian; only his manners and movements, and the living force that dwelt in him like fire in flint, betrayed the European. He was dressed in white drill, exquisitely made; his scarf and tie were of tender coloured silks; on the thwart beside him, there leaned a Winchester rifle. [TET, 71-2]

Sandison posits the Winchester rifle as an emblem of 'law and moral discipline' [342], but while that does fit his reckoning of Attwater, it ignores a larger symbolic significance, namely, the Winchester as the tool of oppression, and savage oppression at that. Sandison's thesis ignores the wider application of the symbolic significance of a weapon deeply imbued with a sense of destructive potentiality of almost mythic proportion, so

much so that Stevenson had already used it as a weapon of preference for Wiltshire in 'The Beach of Falesá'. It may be suggested that Stevenson provides a context within which the 'emblem of law and discipline' begins to seem questionable.

Attwater's status as an authority figure on the island is established in an exchange on board the *Farallone* and subsequent discussion confirms his status as a colonial trader. The emblems of Empire apply: Attwater has his own vessel *Trinity Hall*, and he expresses some surprise that the trio has not encountered it on the voyage. An important assumption is highlighted in this interchange and it relates to the trio's arrival due to 'some small mistake' [72] The reader is left to ponder the implied threat. Attwater's presence on board the *Farallone* is intimidating and Davis attempts to explain matters:

'Well,' said Davis, 'I suppose you may call it an accident. We had heard of your island and read that thing in the *Directory* about the "private reasons", you see; so when we saw the lagoon reflected in the sky, we put her head for it at once, and here we are.'

'Ope we don't intrude!' said Huish.

The stranger looked at Huish with an air of faint surprise, and looked pointedly away again. It was hard to be more offensive in dumb show.

'It may suit me, your coming here,' he said. 'My own schooner is overdue, and I may put something in your way in the meantime. Are you open to a charter?'

'Well, I guess so,' said Davis, 'it depends.' [TET, 72]

The icily self-possessed Attwater is a businessman first and foremost, and his first thought is to use the trio to solve a temporary difficulty due to the absence of his vessel. Davis, Herrick and Huish are useful only as a means to extend Attwater's business interest and the equation works as a metaphor for the exploitative nature of Attwater's class in the pursuit of material gain in the colonies. Attwater's snub of Huish is clearly the product of an arrogance predicated on the knowledge that on his island, he

has the means to exercise absolute power without consideration for the sensibilities of others. Stevenson equates Attwater with the worst aspects of Empire and so establishes a position from which to level criticism against the excesses of exploitative capitalism in the South Pacific.

Stevenson emphasises the class division between Herrick and Attwater, and Huish and Davis, once more shifting the relational geometry of the text. Huish is either sufficiently unaware of Attwater's power to be able to disregard any concern for the first impression he projects, or alternatively, he is already embarked on a plan to deprive Attwater of his 'private interests'. However objectionable the impression Huish makes on Attwater, Herrick's introduction elicits an altogether different response:

The presence of the gentleman lighted up like a candle the vulgarity of the clerk; and Herrick instinctively, as one shields himself from pain, made haste to interrupt.

'My name is Hay,' said he, 'since introductions are going. We shall be very glad if you will step inside.'

Attwater leaned to him swiftly. 'University man?' said he.

'Yes, Merton,' said Herrick, 'and the next moment blushed scarlet at his indiscretion.

'I am of the other lot,' said Attwater. 'Trinity Hall, Cambridge: I called my schooner after the old shop. Well! this is a queer place and company for us to meet in, Mr Hay,' he pursued, with easy incivility to the others. 'But do you bear out...I beg this gentleman's pardon, I really did not catch his name.'

'My name is 'Uish, sir,' returned the clerk, and blushed in turn.

'Ah!' said Attwater. And then turning again to Herrick, 'Do you bear out Mr Whish's description of your vintage, or was it only the unaffected poetry of his own nature bubbling up?'

Herrick was embarrassed; the silken brutality of their visitor made him blush; that he should be accepted as an equal, and the others thus pointedly ignored, pleased him in spite of himself, and then ran through his veins in a recoil of anger. [TET, 73]

Fowler suggests that Attwater's instant recognition of Herrick as a 'University man' may be considered 'Too abrupt, surely, even allowing for *temps* and *moeurs*?'²⁵ Fowler then goes on to suggest that Attwater might have quickly perceived the gulf in social class between himself and

Herrick and Davis and Huish, and seized on it as an opportunity to bring Herrick 'to the mercy seat', that is to say, over to Attwater's side. This is an interesting line of enquiry but there is another facet to Attwater's character and it is his calculated ruthlessness. His classical education certainly takes him as far as the principle of *divide et imperatum* and perhaps this more mundane interpretation sits comfortably alongside the argument that *The Ebb Tide* marks Stevenson's final departure from the portrayal of evil as supernatural. That is to say, Stevenson questions the possibility that evil exists beyond nature and moves towards an insistence on the presence of a nihilistic banality governing the mistreatment of humans by humans. If this is indeed the case, it may be posited that not only does Stevenson move away from the shaping discourse of adventure fiction in *The Ebb Tide*, he addresses issues central to proto-Modernism and its deflation of assumptions regarding Empire. In addition, Attwater has accumulated his riches, and moreover kept them, by exercising careful husbandry: he is not about to be duped by a ragged trio of beachcombers. His recognition of Herrick as 'one of us' is intuitive, in as much as it is based upon accent and manners, and his appeal to Herrick ensures him an ally should any unpleasantness occur.

Attwater's dismissal of Davis and Huish both embarrasses Herrick and, simultaneously, flatters his vanity: he has successfully appealed to that characteristic of the 'University man' which is bound up with a sense of membership, of belonging, and it crosses oceans and continents. Attwater's 'silken brutality' mirrors the arrogance of Empire which promotes the British way, provided it is the British way of the ruling class,

and dismisses anything else as ‘vulgar’ or unworthy, including, of course, the indigenous culture. This particular observation gains currency when Attwater’s evangelicalism becomes apparent later in the narrative. Attwater may function in *The Ebb Tide* as a localised example of the unquestioning attitudes associated with the Imperial project, a manifestation of an almost neo-Calvinist justification in relation to mission that nothing, certainly nothing ‘foreign’ can subvert. There is a huge void separating Attwater and Wiltshire, therefore. Wiltshire, redeemed by the native girl, Uma, is portrayed as an acceptable facet of colonialism: Attwater, lacking any possibility of redemption stands as a metaphor for undiluted exploitative potency. The belief in the Imperial project, vestigial as it may be in *The Ebb Tide*, can be seen to weaken over the course of the two novels, establishing Stevenson as a critic of Empire, alongside Conrad.

Prior to his departure from the *Farallone*, Attwater asks if the vessel has been infected by smallpox. An awareness dawns in the reader that Attwater is either careless about his exposure to smallpox or feels an immunity from its threat. He puts the question typically directly:

‘And, by the by, here is a question I should have asked you when I came on board: have you had smallpox?’

‘Personally, no,’ said Herrick. ‘But the schooner had it.’

‘Deaths?’ from Attwater.

‘Two,’ said Herrick.

‘Well, it is a dreadful sickness,’ said Attwater.

‘Ad you any deaths?’ asked Huish, ‘ere on the island?’

‘Twenty-nine,’ said Attwater. ‘Twenty-nine and thirty-one cases, out of thirty-three souls upon the island. That’s a strange way to calculate, Mr Hay, is it not? Souls! I never say it but it startles me.’

‘Oh, so that’s why everything’s deserted?’ said Huish.

‘That is why, Mr Whish,’ said Attwater, ‘that is why the house is empty and the graveyard full.’ [TET, 73-4]

Stevenson links the terrible disease of smallpox with Attwater, the metaphorical representative of Empire, to create another potent figure within the symbolic structure. The reader is once again reminded of the opening sentence of the novel, as the intricacy of the formal arrangement of *The Ebb Tide* is uncovered.

Stevenson emphasises the contempt with which Attwater views Huish by continual mis-pronunciation of his name, making it sound like the dismissive swatting of an annoying insect. Attwater issues an invitation to dinner but, in making it, manages to insult Davis and Huish by asking them to come one and a half hours after Herrick:

‘I shall particularly expect Mr Whish,’ he continued. ‘Mr Whish, I trust you understand the invitation?’

‘I believe you, my boy!’ replied the genial Huish.

‘That is right then; and quite understood, is it not?’ said Attwater. ‘Mr Whish and Captain Brown at six-thirty without fail, and you, Hay, at four sharp.’ [TET, 74]

The insistence of separation on the grounds of social class extends then, even to the evening meal. Stevenson builds upon the established structure of the novel, re-forming alliances: Davis and Herrick are once again paired in order to attempt a character assessment of Attwater. The interchange shows Herrick’s apparent incapacity for change, or growth. When asked for his opinion of Attwater, Herrick ventures:

‘I do not know,’ said Herrick. ‘I am attracted and repelled. He was unsufferably rude to you.’

‘And you, Huish?’ said the captain.

Huish sat cleaning a favourite briar-root; he scarce looked up from that engrossing task. ‘Don’t ast me what I think of him!’ he said. ‘There’s a day comin’, I pray Gawd, when I can tell it him myself.’ [TET, 77]

Stevenson describes Davis and Huish in terms quite clearly intended to highlight their intrinsic lack of scruples. Again, they are characterized as

the flotsam of the Pacific, a corrupt and corruptive influence that, Stevenson seems to suggest, is worthless when compared to the Pacific islanders themselves: the irony is that they perceive themselves to be superior because of their Western origins. Of course, this applies equally to Attwater: indeed the extent to which whites differ, Stevenson appears to conclude, is only a matter of degree.

With regard to Attwater, Herrick is more attracted than repelled: his natural allegiances will, Stevenson shows, incline him to the view that his own ends will be better served by forming an alliance with Attwater. That psychological consideration is important on its own terms, but the key issue, once again, is Stevenson's proto-Modernist deflation of assumptions about Empire. His examination of the motives behind these relational alliances is indicative of a new and interesting departure toward a critique of Empire in which the European coloniser, in varying ways, impacts upon the indigenous population.

Davis knows that he can manipulate the situation to further his own ends, and has already determined his next course of action:

‘Hear, me!’ Herrick burst out suddenly.

‘No, you better hear me first,’ said Davis. ‘Hear me and understand me. *We’ve* got no use for that fellow, whatever you may have. He’s your kind, he’s not ours; he’s took to you, and he’s wiped his boots on me and Huish. Save him if you can!’

‘Save him?’ repeated Herrick.

‘Save him, if you’re able!’ reiterated Davis, with a blow of his clenched fist. ‘Go ashore and talk him smooth; and if you get him and his pearls aboard, I’ll spare him. If you don’t, there’s going to be a funeral. Is that so, Huish? does that suit you?’

‘I ain’t a forgiving man,’ said Huish, ‘but I’m not the sort to spoil business neither. Bring the bloke on board and his pearls along with him, and you can have it your own way; maroon him where you like - I’m agreeable.’

‘Well, and if I can’t?’ cried Herrick, while the sweat streamed upon his face. ‘You talk to me as if I was God Almighty, to do this and that! But if I can’t?’

‘My son,’ said the captain, ‘you better do your level best, or you’ll see sights!’ [TET, 78]

Empire begins to emerge as a murderously ruthless struggle to gain a pearl of great price and Stevenson establishes this core symbol in relation to Attwater and the trio. The intention is clear: to rob Attwater of his pearls and abandon him on an island - the South Pacific had a notorious precedent in the mutiny on the *Bounty*; Davis is clearly inclined to follow that example in his lust for Attwater's pearls. The association of 'God Almighty' and 'My son' in the dialogue between Herrick and Davis prefigures a further shift in the geometry of alliances which will follow later. However, it is significant that the language of religion is used here to encourage an act of criminality and the sense of the language of the confessional is particularly apposite given the subject at hand. Davis will use the phrase again, with even greater regularity and emphasis following his conversion.

Stevenson establishes the certainty of religious zealotry as a corollary of the mindset that sought to gather the nations of the world together in the 'civilising' process of Empire. The role of religion in the acquisition of Empire is a recurring issue in 'The Beach of Falesá' and in *The Ebb Tide* and there appears to be a concomitant rise in fundamentalist views the further from the centre the 'missionary' travels. In a symbolic sense, the enthusiasm for proselytising converts equates with an enthusiasm to control and dominate and Attwater functions in this sense in *The Ebb Tide*.

The narrative moves on to incorporate the geometry of the quartette but that is not a securely established structure. The difficulty in settling on

a narrative arrangement that is stable is caused, on the one hand, by the unpredictability of Attwater. It appears that he understands the trio's purpose from the moment of their landfall, yet he is inclined to cultivate the company of Herrick. Herrick's own irresolution and weakness and his inability to commit himself either to Attwater or to the conspirators, results in the malleable structure that is the basis for 'Better Acquaintance.' In the episode in which Herrick and Attwater meet prior to dinner, the narrative arrangement of duets is briefly re-established prior to dinner when, on the surface at least, the quartette will re-form.

Herrick's arrival on the island is notable for the sense of reluctance he feels and his inner feelings seemed to be mocked by an inanimate presence:

From the crown of the beach, the figurehead confronted him with what seemed irony, her helmeted head tossed back, her formidable arm apparently hurling something, whether spell or missile, in the direction of the anchored schooner. She seemed a defiant deity from the island, coming forth to its threshold with a rush as if of one about to fly, and perpetuated in that dashing attitude. Herrick looked up at her, where she towered above him head and shoulders, with singular feelings of curiosity and romance, and suffered his mind to travel to and fro in her life-history. So long she had been the blind conductress of a ship among the waves; so long she had stood here idle in the violent sun that yet did not avail to blister her; and was even this the end of so many adventures, he wondered, or was more behind? And he could have found it in his heart to regret that she was not a goddess, nor yet he a pagan, that he might have bowed down before her in that hour of difficulty.

[TET, 80]

The image of the 'leprous white' figurehead first revealed as the *Farallone* gained the inner sanctum of the lagoon, confronts Herrick and the impression of Britannia is once again emphasised as he remarks on her 'helmeted head' and the throwing arm. This is a significant point in relation to the present day reader, but its significance to Stevenson's first readers must have been even greater: the image would have brought to

mind the familiar figure of Britannia. Stevenson's description is important: everything suggests Britannia, her 'helmet', the arm raised in a gesture suggestive of carrying a 'missile' and, as a 'blind conductress', she rules the waves as a ship's figurehead is seen to do. Furthermore, Stevenson describes her as being like 'a defiant deity from the island' and within the symbolic framework of the novel it may be suggested that he seeks to establish the equation of island and Empire. Britannia, then, the deity of Empire, greets the trio as they make landfall on Attwater's island. Her location on the pier-head, the first figure to be encountered on arrival at Attwater's island, is a particularly appropriate position for this figure to dominate. On one level, she symbolises the hardness of mind Attwater himself has demonstrated in his dealings with the trio on board ship and, significantly, only Herrick seems to have acknowledged the latent threat he represents to their ambitions. Stevenson links Britannia and Attwater as powerful symbols of an Empire with which he had become disenchanted. On another level, the figurehead symbolises the grand narrative of British imperialism in the popular imagination of the late-Victorian period. She, like Attwater, symbolises strength of a fearful nature, even exposure to sea and sun 'did not avail to blister her': Stevenson likens her to a 'deity' and so further connects Attwater to a power greater than that which is natural. The way has been prepared for the revelation of Attwater as a God-like figure with a Winchester rifle. Herrick acknowledges that the figurehead is *not* a goddess and he is no pagan to kneel before her, but the implication remains, even impressionistically, that he may be ready to subjugate himself to Attwater's will when the time comes. On a literal

level, the focus of the narrative is Attwater, however, on a symbolic level, it is Empire that dominates. Herrick's refusal to bow down before the figurehead, or Attwater or Empire does not indicate a resolute, determined refusal to participate in the Imperial project, it suggests a temporary crisis of certainty, a key trope in the early Modernist novel.

Onboard the *Farallone*, Attwater has shown two discrete aspects of his character: the biting sarcasm, even brutal wit that reduces both Huish and Davis to the status of resentful curs, and the ingratiating cultivation of Herrick. The beaching of 'Britannia' on this distant island establishes Attwater as a figure embodying supreme power in relation to the trio. He does after all hold the power of life or death over them given their circumstances, but there is another aspect to Attwater and it is this: he himself, like the land-bound figurehead is also 'on the beach'. Stevenson figures Attwater as the symbol of an Empire which is itself 'washed up', potent as a symbol but increasingly under threat from perhaps less sophisticated but more aggressive competitors. Once again, Stevenson's personal experience of colonial competition, and the deleterious effects of that competition on the South Seas communities finds its way into his fiction. The resulting insight into the crises of Empire at the end of the nineteenth century is at least as revealing as the journalism of *In the South Seas* or *A Footnote to History*. The trio may also be read as representations of those powers bent on subverting the axiomatic assumption of British power in the South Pacific. 'Britannia' is now beached, having been an impressive sea-going presence: it is a powerful metaphor for an Empire in decline and Stevenson is both astute observer

and part-prophet in having the acuity to identify the global ebbing of British influence. It should be emphasised, and Stevenson insists upon the point, that Britannia is beached upon an island that has a full graveyard due to the spreading of disease by European imperialists.

Herrick's progress to the home of Attwater is marked by an impression of orderliness and colonisation, and an uncanny absence of human activity. As he walks towards the colonnade behind which he can make out the various buildings the silence is broken only by the sounds of poultry, disturbed by Herrick's approach.

Herrick's survey of the surrounding area reveals several images which impress themselves upon him:

The storehouses were nearest him upon his right. The first was locked; in the second, he could dimly perceive, through a window, a certain accumulation of pearl shell piled in the far end; the third, which stood gaping open on the afternoon, seized on the mind of Herrick with its multiplicity and disorder of romantic things. Therein were cables, windlasses and blocks of every size and capacity; cabin windows and ladders; rusty tanks, a companion hatch; a binnacle with its brass mountings and its compass idly pointing, in the confusion and the dusk of that shed, to a forgotten pole; ropes, anchors, harpoons, a blubber-dipper of copper, green with years, a steering wheel, a tool chest with the vessel's name upon the top, the *Asia*: a whole curiosity shop of sea-curios, gross and solid, heavy to lift, ill to break, bound with brass and shod with iron. Two wrecks at least must have contributed to this random heap of lumber; and as Herrick looked upon it, it seemed to him as if the two ships' companies were there on guard, and he heard the tread of feet and whisperings, and saw with the tail of his eye the commonplace ghosts of sailormen. [TET, 81]

As Herrick ruminates on the lumber, he is joined, silently, by Attwater who asks 'does Mr Hay find a parable?' The 'parable', the symbolic significance, is emphatic: the binnacle with its compass pointing 'to a forgotten pole', suggests a metaphor for the lost direction of the Imperial project. It is beached and in 'the dusk of that shed', the Light once associated with the 'civilising' project is now dimmed. The images

occlude to suggest, along with the title of the novel itself, an Empire on the ebb. The impression grows that Stevenson is engaged on a critique of Empire using forms and symbols of a proto-Modernist nature in order to counter, or to deflate, the chauvinistic assumptions about Empire that continued to represent the Imperial project in some quarters. Herrick, still using the assumed name, is indeed moved by the impression created. The sense of the narrative collapsing into the dialogue between Attwater and Herrick is prefigured by the listing of the detritus of shipwreck witnessed by Herrick. Attwater remarks:

‘The ruins of an empire would leave me frigid, when a bit of an old rail that an old shellback leaned on in the middle watch, would bring me up all standing. But come, let’s see some more of the island. It’s all sand and coral and palm-trees; but there’s a kind of quaintness in the place.’ [TET, 81-2]

Stevenson, again, emphasises the Empire and its decline and the effects on the participants. In particular, he suggests that hypocrisy lies close to the core of Attwater’s ‘Empire’: there is a real sense that Attwater fails to convince as he attempts to play down the importance of Empire in his value system, yet the emblems of Empire are everywhere on view. Again, Stevenson associates the disingenuous with the workings of the Imperial project as Attwater is established as a powerful symbol of European dominion in general and of the British Empire in particular. The contrast between Herrick’s impression of the island, built upon the surviving remnants from wrecked ships and Attwater’s emphasis of the natural advantages opposes that which is ‘native’ and that which is the product of ‘civilisation.’ The evidence of European visitation is figured in terms of wreckage, or materiel that is redundant and useless; once again, the symbolic significance is fore-grounded. There is the sense that the

products of different civilisations have come to grief on Attwater's island, and the thought must resonate in Herrick's mind when he sees the remains of previous visitors' ships. Herrick, however, is impressed with the beauty of the place and delighted by Attwater's name for it, particularly since its origins are in his favourite *Aeneid*: the island has been named Zacynthos²⁶

The contrast between the island idyll, a modern South Seas paradise, and the detritus produced by the pearl-fishing operation is stark: Stevenson equates the Imperial project with the spreading of disease, but also with the destruction of the natural beauty of the South Pacific. Attwater's guided tour of the island exposes Herrick to the realities of the exploitative venture:

He opened a door, and Herrick saw a large display of apparatus neatly ordered: pumps and pipes, and the leaded boots, and the huge snouted helmets shining in rows along the walls - ten complete outfits.

'The whole eastern half of my lagoon is shallow, you must understand,' said Attwater; 'so we were able to get in the dress to great advantage. It paid beyond belief, and was a queer sight when they were at it, and these marine monsters' - tapping the nearest of the helmets - 'kept appearing and reappearing in the midst of the lagoon. Fond of parables?' he asked abruptly.

'Oh, yes!' said Herrick.

'Well, I saw these machines come up dripping and go down again, and come up dripping and go down again, and all the while the fellow inside as dry as toast!' said Attwater, 'and I thought we all wanted a dress to go down into the world in, and come up scatheless. What do you think the name was?' he enquired.

'Self-conceit,' said Herrick.

'Ah, but I mean seriously!' said Attwater.

'Call it self-respect, then!' corrected Herrick, with a laugh.

'And why not grace? Why not God's grace, Hay?' asked Attwater. 'Why not the grace of your Maker and Redeemer, he who died for you, he who upholds you, he whom you daily crucify afresh? There is nothing here' - striking on his bosom - 'nothing there' - smiting the wall - 'and nothing there' - stamping - 'nothing but God's grace! We walk upon, we breathe it; we live and die by it; it makes the nails and axles of the universe: and a puppy in pajamas prefers self-conceit!' The huge dark man stood over against Herrick by the line of the divers' helmets, and seemed to swell and glow; and the next moment the life had gone from him. 'I beg your pardon,' said he; 'I see you don't believe in God?'

'Not in your sense, I am afraid,' said Herrick.

Stevenson's reference to parables is ironic: Attwater re-figures the commercial diving operation designed to strip the islands of their naturally occurring wealth into a moral tale in which he, by the grace of God, functions as an evangelising force, but 'the pearl of great price' remains just that: commercial gain. The 'self-conceit' implicit in that version of events alluded to by Herrick and the image of the 'huge dark man' suggest Lucifer, and the inter-relation of Empire, commercial exploitation and Attwater's brand of religion come together in a combination that would seem to justify Stevenson's concerns about the public reception of the text. In a letter to Colvin, dated 18th May 1893, Stevenson writes: 'I shall put in this envelope the end of the ever-to-be-execrated *Ebb-Tide*, or Stevenson's Blooming Error.' The several-pronged attack on imperialism was, as Stevenson accurately predicted, bound to cause trouble.

Herrick's rejection of Attwater's fundamentalist religion is important not simply because of the rejection of his brand of Christianity, a brand most familiar to Stevenson himself from his early childhood onwards, but because there is a parallel significance hitherto ignored in discussions of *The Ebb Tide*. Herrick is weak and his weakness is, it may be argued, that shortcoming which is implicit in the Greek word '*akrasia*': a flaw in character identified particularly in Plato, and more explicitly in the work, *The Republic*. Plato specified the type of weakness Herrick demonstrates (*akrasia*) as a weakness of the will that occurs when someone gives in to the short-term, selfish desire rather than following the course known to be right. Herrick has gone along with the suggestions of others, we understand, when it would have been better to make a stand for what he

has known to be right: his fundamental flaw is that he is incapable of such affirmative behaviour. However, Stevenson opposes Herrick in this vignette with Attwater, who has the opposite view of decision-making: his behaviour is predicated on the Greek word '*arete*', a term which is linked to behaving in a manner which evidences integrity and strength of character. Plato's Republic would be organised along those principles which see strong individuals act with integrity in everyday matters of government, or ideally, citizens would possess the quality of '*arete*' and government, as such, would be unnecessary. Attwater's fundamentalist approach to questions of ethics is alarming to Herrick who self-confessedly cannot bring himself to acknowledge a belief in God such as Attwater possesses. Herrick's inability to make a commitment to Attwater may save him from the fate that will befall Davis, but his only alternative is to wait for the next tide, the ebb tide, to carry him off, rudderless, in a new direction. His is the plight of the modern figure: dislocated from family and country, he is faced with a series of unacceptable alternatives, a predicament he can neither tolerate nor bring to a conclusion.

The enclosed world of Attwater's island might function as a metaphor for the world as envisaged in *The Republic* and if Stevenson is critical of weakness, as manifest in the person of Herrick, he is certainly more critical of the absolutism of Attwater. It may also be suggested that the island operates as a microcosmic representation of Empire and within Attwater's Empire, the strong survive and the weak, or diseased, perish as evidenced by the fully populated cemetery.

The first encounter with Attwater on Zacynthos offers the reader a choice between the scepticism of Herrick and the determinism of the island's ruler. If the third person narrator is offering an autobiographical presentation of Stevenson's own views on the character of Attwater, then it might be posited that Stevenson has travelled some substantial distance from the beliefs of his childhood and youth to examine with some scepticism the gulf between good and evil. As stated earlier, Stevenson, in *The Ebb Tide*, has left behind the 'evil' of folkloric tradition, that is to say, the bogies and brownies and figures from supernatural sources, and has located evil instead in the banal cruelty of everyday existence. It is in this sense that the text comes to evidence a significantly 'modern' feel. The location of responsibility with the individual demands honesty and Stevenson emphasises throughout 'The Beach of Falesá', and more stridently in *The Ebb Tide*, that the Imperial project is founded on a lie. The civilising, evangelising endeavour is a cover for rapacious capitalism. A growing uneasiness about the motives of Empire characterises the 1890s and early 1900s: Stevenson, writing in 1893 close to the front-line, is perfectly placed to observe and record the working of Empire. His much-publicised support of Samoan self-determination locates him in the anti-imperialist camp and prefigures the work of another influential critic of Empire, J.A. Hobson. Hobson, writing at the end of the Boer War in 1902, states:

Imperialism and popular government have nothing in common: they differ in spirit, in policy, in method. Of policy and method I have already spoken; it remains to point out how the spirit of Imperialism poisons the springs of democracy in the mind and character of the people. As our free self-governing colonies have furnished hope, encouragement, and leading to the popular aspiration in Great Britain, not merely by practical successes in the arts of popular government, but by the wafting of a spirit of freedom and

equality, so our despotically ruled dependencies have ever served to damage the character of our people by feeding the habits of snobbish subservience, the admiration of wealth and rank, the corrupt survivals of the inequalities of feudalism. [EW, 295]

Attwater's island 'Empire' is characterised by the 'feudalism' commented upon by Hobson: he is the ruler, the native population, or more accurately the survivors, his people. Despite his references to religious evangelism, Attwater embodies the elitist assumptions of racial superiority that fuelled the poisonous Imperialism that Stevenson, Hobson, and Conrad all found repellent.

Herrick is affected by the references to God's grace and momentarily disorientated by them:

Herrick was like one in a dream. He had come there with a mind divided; come prepared to study that ambiguous and sneering mask, drag out the essential man from underneath, and act accordingly: decision being till then postponed. Iron cruelty, an iron insensibility to the suffering of others, the uncompromising pursuit of his own interests, cold culture, manners without humanity; these he had looked for, these he still thought he saw. But to find the whole machine thus glow with the reverberation of religious zeal, surprised him beyond words; and he laboured in vain, as he walked, to piece together into any kind of whole his odds and ends of knowledge - to adjust again, into any kind of focus with itself, his picture of the man beside him.

[TET, 83]

The 'religious zeal' which Stevenson alludes to, is of course, a central theme in his South Seas fiction, and the determination of the missionaries to convert the Polynesian islanders is clear in 'The Beach of Falesá', as Tarleton and Galuchet compete for souls. The implied criticism of this process in 'The Beach of Falesá' is translated into a much more explicit condemnation in *The Ebb Tide*, especially as the beliefs of Attwater are explored. Herrick is, as we already know, both 'attracted and repelled' by Attwater, and Stevenson teases out Herrick's fascination in an apparently innocuous exchange that gets to the core of Attwater's religious mission:

‘What brought you here to the South Seas?’ he asked presently.

‘Many things,’ said Attwater. ‘Youth, curiosity, romance, the love of the sea, and (it will surprise you to hear) an interest in missions. That has a good deal declined, which will surprise you less. They go the wrong way to work; they are too parsonish, too much of the old wife, and even the old apple-wife. *Clothes, clothes*, are their idea; but the clothes are not Christianity, any more than they are the sun in heaven, or could take the place of it! They think a parsonage with roses, and church bells, and nice old women bobbing in the lanes, are part and parcel of religion. But religion is a savage thing like the universe it illuminates: savage, cold and bare, but infinitely strong.’ [TET, 83]

The emphasis in these extracts on religion, so central to the Imperial project, functions also to highlight another symbolic significance: the equation of religious zeal and deception. Even as the Empire robbed and spread disease it convinced itself that it was engaged in the holy task of bringing civilisation, Christian and classical, to the dark places of the earth. Stevenson inverts conventional symbolic values of ‘Light’ and ‘Dark’ and shows that white-hot zeal produces blindness not enlightenment. The complex symbolic arrangement based upon the binary opposition of the light that blinds is raised once again: the Imperial project brings something other than clarity of vision. Importantly, Herrick-as-witness suggests the identification of Stevenson in that role, maintaining the ‘autobiographical’ presence within the text.

Herrick’s initial impressions are confirmed as Attwater expands on the need for religion, but religion of a different cast from that he has witnessed performed by the missionaries from rural England. The need as Attwater states it, is for all impressions of cosy homilies and hand-rubbing self-satisfaction to be excised and replaced by the ‘savagery’ of ‘true’ religion:

‘I was a man of the world before I was a Christian; I’m a man of the world still, and I made my mission pay. No good ever came of coddling. A man has to stand up in God’s sight and work up to his weight avoirdupois; then I’ll

talk to him but not before. I gave these beggars what they wanted: a judge in Israel, the bearer of the sword and scourge; I was making a new people here; and behold! the angel of the Lord smote them and they were not!’

[TET, 84]

The suspicion exists that Stevenson is, through Attwater, suggesting that the religion of Empire changes in the field: it does not foreground the forgiveness of Christian obligation but rather, represents Empire-as-power.

The mindset is that of the bigot, self-appointed to give the ‘beggars’ what they need: the assumption is, of course, that Attwater, reflecting the Imperial project, and this cast of missionary in general, is in the privileged position of knowing what is good for ‘them’ better than they do themselves. Of course, in the opening sentence of the novel, Stevenson states that what they bring is disease. By such means indigenous cultures decline and are replaced by the ‘superior’ product brought by missionaries: Stevenson had experienced the influence of Western missionaries on visits around the Pacific and wrote specifically about their work in the Paumotus:

The archipelago is divided between two main religions, Catholic and Mormon. They front each other proudly with a false air of permanence; yet are but shapes, their membership in a perpetual flux. The Mormon attends mass with devotion; the Catholic sits attentive at a Mormon sermon, and tomorrow each may have transferred allegiance. One man had been a pillar of the Church of Rome for fifteen years; his wife dying, he decided that must be a poor religion that could not save a man his wife, and turned Mormon. According to one informant, Catholicism was the more fashionable in health, but on the approach of sickness, it was judged prudent to secede. As a Mormon, there were five chances out of six you might recover; as a Catholic, your hopes were small; and this opinion is perhaps founded on the comfortable right of unction. [ItSS, 173]

Stevenson suggests, somewhat patronisingly, but in keeping with the time, that the islanders came to their own arrangements with regard to worship, basing decisions on their own superstition rather than on

doctrine. It can be seen, nevertheless, that he sees that missionaries were widespread and determined to have flocks however fickle their adherents. Attwater's religious fervour is theologically close to the precepts of Old Testament doctrine, and consequently, near to Stevenson's own early religious instruction at the hands of Alison Cunningham, whose influence never left him. The avenging God of the Old Testament, quick to anger and to judge, is the basis for much of the old religion of Scotland, that Calvinism which fascinated Stevenson throughout his life. In the character of Attwater, he traces the extremes of that doctrine and elucidates the dangers in applying it without benefit of human charity. The connection between Attwater, Empire, and religious zeal is established by the common belief in justification. Attwater, the metaphor for Empire, secure in his membership of the elect establishes links to Robert Wringhim. Attwater's outpourings on the nature of religion resemble Wringhim's zeal when he meets Gil-Martin for the first time and believes himself to be soaring above the sordid mass of mean humanity.

Attwater may also be the apostle of capitalism in the guise of religious proselytiser, and once again, a metaphor for the Imperial project: after all, the community he has established works for his benefit only. Those who have perished in the process lie in the island graveyard and receive the following appreciation from Attwater:

'Coral to coral, pebbles to pebbles,' he said, 'this has been the main scene of my activity in the South Pacific. Some were good and some bad, and the majority (of course and always) null. Here was a fellow now that used to frisk like a dog; if you had called him, he came like an arrow from a bow; if you had not, and he came unbidden, you should have seen the deprecating eye and the little intricate dancing step! Well, his trouble is over now, he has lain down with kings and councillors: the rest of his acts, are they not written in the Book of Chronicles? That fellow was from Penrhyn; like all the Penrhyn islanders he was ill to manage; heady, jealous, violent: the man with

the nose! He lies here quiet enough. And so they all lie. "And darkness was the burier of the dead."

He stood, in the strong glow of the sunset, with bowed head; his voice sounded now sweet and now bitter with the varying sense.

'You loved these people?' cried Herrick, strangely touched.

'I?' said Attwater. 'Dear, no! Don't think me a philanthropist. I dislike men and I hate women. If I like the islands at all, it is because you see them here plucked of their lendings, their dead birds and cocked hats, their petticoats and coloured hose. Here was one I liked though,' and he set his foot upon a mound. 'He was a fine savage fellow; he had a dark soul; yes, I liked this one. I am fanciful,' he added, looking hard at Herrick, 'and I take fads. I like you.' [TET, 84-5]

The fate of the islanders, exploited by Attwater, subjected to a foreign plague and finally buried on Attwater's island under the Red Ensign, converges in a powerful symbol of the commodity-like quality of their existence in the colonial era on the one hand, and of their exclusion from light and salvation on the other: "And darkness was the burier of the dead" is a reference to *Henry IV, Part Two* and highlights Attwater's cold intellectualism: he quotes Shakespeare, but the reader questions to what extent he relates to the sentiment; this might also be said of his fondness for Biblical citation. Scripture sounds empty and even perverse on his lips. The reference to Shakespeare is important: it emphasises the role of culture and civilisation, but once again, the effect is ironic.

Stevenson introduces the image of Davis and Huish as 'wolves', again an ironic comparison when viewed against the arrogance and *sang-froid* of Attwater. Like Kayerts and Carlier, they are the drones of Empire. Herrick attempts a defence of Davis, citing his status as a 'family man' [85] as proof of worth; Attwater suggests that in the company of such men, Herrick should therefore have need of self-disgust. The insistence on division on the grounds of social class is again emphasised, illustrating the diversity of the participants in the Imperial project, and suggesting the

responsibility for its execution resides with the ruling class. Herrick's response exposes not only his own short-comings, but reveals further the inner thoughts of Attwater:

'Do we not all despise ourselves?' cried Herrick. 'Do not you?'

'Oh, I say I do. But do I?' said Attwater. 'One thing I know at least: I never gave a cry like yours, Hay. It came from a bad conscience! Ah, man, that poor diving-dress of self-conceit is sadly tattered. Today, if ye will hear my voice. Today, now, while the sun sets, and here in this burying place of brown innocents, fall on your knees and cast your sins and sorrows on the Redeemer. Hay - '

'Not Hay!' interrupted the other strangling. 'Don't call me that! I mean...For God's sake, can't you see I'm on the rack?'

'I see it, I know it. I put and keep you there, my fingers are on the screws!' said Attwater. 'Please God, I will bring a penitent this night before his throne. Come, come to the mercy seat! He waits to be gracious, man - waits to be gracious!'

He spread out his arms like a crucifix; his face shone with the brightness of a seraph's; in his voice, as it rose to the last word, the tears seemed ready. [TET, 86]

Herrick cannot make the commitment; he is incapable of belief in the manner of Attwater and thus, perhaps, his weakness saves him from something worse, the certainty of the bigot and oppressor whose faith is predicated on the assumption that he is in possession of the true faith to the exclusion of all others. The impression strengthens that Herrick, the witness-figure, is located at a remove from direct involvement in the processes of imperialism. Stevenson, by opposing Herrick and Attwater, draws a distinction between the individual caught up in the ebb and flow of the Imperial project and the committed participant. This is a key point and assists in establishing *The Ebb Tide* as a modern critique of Empire. The division between self and other, central to issues of modernity, especially with regard to power relations, becomes important in the relationship between Herrick and Attwater. Herrick, the non-combatant, ineffectual 'failure' is educated and so competent to function in the role of

witness, whereas Attwater's education, symbolically mirroring the light that blinds, is redundant and emblematic. His significance in relation to his status as a metaphor for Empire is further emphasised: he has the means to provide enlightenment, but instead he brings darkness.

Attwater presents a figure of such strength that Herrick can never feel anything other than inadequate in his company and following his admission that he cannot believe like Attwater, Herrick experiences further mortification and self-disgust:

Herrick stood his ground a moment with clenched fists and teeth; and as he so stood, the fact of his errand there slowly swung clear in front of him, like the moon out of clouds. He had come to lure that man on board; he was failing, even if it could be said that he had tried; he was sure to fail now, and knew it, and knew it was better so. And what was to be next?

With a groan he turned to follow his host, who was standing with a polite smile, and instantly, and somewhat obsequiously, led the way into the now darkened colonnade of palms. There they went in silence; the earth gave up richly of her perfume, the air tasted warm and aromatic in the nostrils, and from a great way forward in the wood, the brightness of lights and fire marked out the house of Attwater. [TET, 87]

Herrick, having been given the task of getting Attwater back aboard the *Farallone*, he has failed to do that: there is a sense in which Herrick is moved to warn Attwater of the motives of Huish and Davis due to his ambivalent feelings towards Attwater, but on balance he decides that he must throw in his lot with his unlikely shipmates. Here Herrick displays all the soul-searching of the Hamlet-figure: to act or not to act, to ponder or to act? Stevenson's own ambivalence is perhaps foregrounded here in a thinly disguised autobiographical insight into his own beliefs as they pass through a transition from the hard-line Calvinism of his youth to a more mature, and more sceptical mindset. Fowler suggests that Stevenson's experiences in the South Seas, such as his defence of Father Damien, missionary to the Molokai leper colony and friendship with the

missionary James Chalmers, may in some unexplained way constitute signs of ‘religious conversion’²⁷, but qualifies the statement by suggesting that this may be a misleading assumption. However, to this extent Fowler may be right: it may be that Stevenson’s reflections on the metaphysical indicate a deepening and maturing religious *insight* and that is not necessarily incompatible with a dislike of either zealotry or hypocrisy. That stated, Stevenson’s later letters shown no evidence of a ‘conversion’ such as Fowler posits. In a letter to his cousin, Bob Stevenson, written only weeks before his death, Stevenson has this to say:

The damned thing of our education is that Christianity does not recognize and hallow Sex. It looks askance at it, over its shoulder, oppressed as it is by reminiscences of hermits and Asiatic self-torturers. When I came to myself fairly about twenty-five I recognized once for all the Lingam and the Yoni²⁸ as the true religious symbols. An eye also might do. It is a terrible hiatus in our modern religions that they cannot see and make venerable that which they ought to see first and hallow most.²⁹

Even allowing for Stevenson’s legendary fondness for ironic, tongue-in-cheek remarks, this does not immediately conjure up an image of a newly converted zealot. It is likely that Stevenson’s portrayal of Attwater is ambivalent: certainly, he had encountered missionaries who impressed him by their example, but he had met the other cast also, and the drawing together of the relics of Empire around Attwater’s settlement argues for a sceptical response to any suggestion that Attwater may, in some mystical way, represent a revival of Stevenson’s faith.

The central importance in the exchange between Attwater and Herrick is that the latter has once again drawn on his own resources and come up empty handed, again emphasising the different symbolic representations of the Imperial project. On returning to the station, Attwater invites Herrick to wash his hands and meets the fourth survivor of the epidemic,

an island woman whom Attwater has had married off, lest he be tempted by her. As if in possession of an uncanny insight into the plans of the trio, Attwater mentions the pearls and invites Herrick to have a look:

This confirmation of the captain's guess hit Herrick hard, and he contained himself with difficulty. 'No, thank you, I think not,' said he. 'I do not care for pearls. I am very indifferent to all these...'

'Gewgaws?' suggested Attwater. 'And yet I believe you ought to cast an eye on my collection, which is really unique and which - Oh! it is the case with all of us and everything about us! - hangs by a hair. Today it groweth up and flourisheth; tomorrow it is cut down and cast into the oven. Today it is here and together in this safe; tomorrow - tonight! - it may be scattered. Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee.'

'I do not understand you,' said Herrick.

'Not?' said Attwater.

'You seem to speak in riddles,' said Herrick, unsteadily. 'I do not understand what manner of man you are, nor what you are driving at.'

Attwater stood with his hands upon his hips, and his head bent forward. 'I am a fatalist,' he replied, 'and just now (if you insist on it) an experimentalist. Talking of which, by the by, who painted out the schooner's name?' he said, with mocking softness, 'because, do you know? one thinks it should be done again. It can still be partly read; and whatever is worth doing, is surely worth doing well. You think with me? That is so nice! Well, shall we step on the verandah? I have a dry sherry that I would like your opinion of.' [TET, 90.]

The changing aspect of Attwater, from cold, knowing insightful demigod, to affable host is disconcerting and functions as yet another device to de-stabilise Herrick: in addition, it is another example of Stevenson merging the narrative framework with the central thematic elements of the text, so further de-stabilising the reader's certainty.

A characteristic element of the Modernist text is the desire to question accepted values and, by extension, to create an atmosphere within which established attitudes are subjected to scrutiny. By this criterion alone Stevenson can be seen to mount his own modernist challenge on the central assumptions of Empire. The importance of symbolic structures within modernist texts is reflected in the novel and as Stevenson searches for a suitable framework within which to substantiate his critique of

Empire, he becomes more reliant on the use of non-literal values. This is an important issue because Stevenson's preoccupation with history, apparent in novels such as *Kidnapped* and *Catriona*, has another significance in respect of *The Ebb Tide*. In his essay 'The metaphysics of Modernism', Michael Bell writes:

Modernist writers were almost obsessively concerned with history in a double sense: they were concerned with what was happening in their world and with the nature of historical understanding as such. The mythopoeic basis of history has several different aspects, but it importantly includes an underlying recognition of the projective nature of all historical meaning.
[AGM, 14-15]

The Ebb Tide is Stevenson's critical 'history' of Empire, written from the standpoint of the on-the-ground observer. It examines the myth of the Imperial project and rejects the claims of the Attwater-class that 'savagery' is the price levied against enlightenment.

It might be suggested that a more mature and sceptical Stevenson is casting doubt on the very nature of certainty itself. In the passage immediately before they are joined by Davis and Huish for dinner, Herrick witnesses yet another change in Attwater which further undercuts his confidence in assessing his host accurately:

Herrick followed him to where, under the light of the hanging lamps, the table shone with napery and crystal; followed him as the criminal goes with the hangman or the sheep with the butcher; took the sherry mechanically, drank it, and spoke mechanical words of praise. The object of his terror had become suddenly inverted; till then he had seen Attwater trussed and gagged, a helpless victim, and had longed to run in and save him; he saw him now tower up mysterious and menacing, the angel of the Lord's wrath, armed with knowledge and threatening judgment.' [TET, 90]

The arrival of Davis and Huish at the beginning of 'The Dinner Party', heralds a banquet of epicurean excess at which Attwater, Davis and Huish appear to be perfectly at their ease. Herrick is less comfortable, and

Stevenson closes on the reason with alacrity, creating as he does so, a sense of the tensions around the table as they are channelled through Herrick's consciousness. This process is remarkably like Fitzgerald's use of Nick Carraway as a 'moral barometer' in *The Great Gatsby*, and complicates the narrative structure at a point where the geometry of allegiances is about to undergo another shift:

Over the third guest, the incidents of the dinner may be said to have passed for long unheeded. Herrick accepted all that was offered him, ate and drank without tasting, and heard without comprehension. His mind was singly occupied in contemplating the horror of the circumstance in which he sat. What Attwater knew, what the captain designed, from which side treachery was to be first expected, these were the ground of his thoughts. There were times when he longed to throw down the table and flee into the night. And even that was debarred him; to do anything, to say anything, to move at all, were only to precipitate the barbarous tragedy; and he sat spellbound, eating with white lips: Medusa's head. Two of his companions observed him narrowly, Attwater with raking, side-long glances that did not interrupt his talk, the captain with a heavy and anxious consideration. [TET, 92-3]

At this point, there is a sense of almost melodramatic, adventure-yarn expectation but Stevenson complicates this reading by showing that Herrick is able to see the moral abyss as represented by the individuals around the table. These symbolic emblems stand for the moral abyss that is Empire itself: Attwater, the representative of the ruling class and the others as the disaffected, or debilitated foot-soldiers of Empire.

Herrick's natural weakness makes him wholly unsuited to carry the strain that exists around the table, and he is inclined to sit silently while Davis and Huish enter into conversation with Attwater. Each of the parties is watchful, until Davis asks Attwater if they, the trio, are the first white men to visit the island. Attwater's response is ambiguous: he suggests it likely that he and Dr Symmonds were the first whites to land on the island. He then goes on to speculate that the arrangement of the palms

around the present settlement appears to have resulted from planning rather than being the product of ‘nature’s planting’ [93]. The ambiguity in Attwater’s statement is significant; it is difficult to determine whether Stevenson implies that there has been a presence on the island in the past which was beneficent, and cultivated the trees for shelter, thereby figuring the present landlord as, by comparison, less well-intentioned and interested only in personal gain. Such a conclusion is consistent with the view that Attwater, a symbol of imperialist power, represents the worst elements of whites in the Pacific and bolsters the argument that Stevenson deliberately sets out to present him in that light.

During dinner, Attwater continues where he left off on the *Farallone*, teasing Huish with the appellation ‘Mr Whish’: this tactic is deliberate and done to goad Huish to a response, but it is Davis who objects to Attwater’s constant mis-pronunciation of Huish’s name. Attwater seems to acknowledge Davis’s objection but immediately ignores it when next he addresses Huish; the insult consequently attaches to Davis also. It is both ironic, and deeply significant, that he should attempt to undermine Huish’s true identity in this way. By this stage in the narrative Attwater is aware that false names have been used by the trio, and it appears as if he wishes to assert the authority accrued with that knowledge to name, or perhaps mis-name Huish, rather in the manner of a possession. It is a direct challenge to the man’s sense of himself, and suggests wilful arrogance: Attwater exudes a sense of his own capability to deal with any eventuality, and an awareness of this makes Herrick even less

comfortable. Attwater calls for more wine, suggesting that he eagerly awaits Mr Whish's opinion of it:

As the boy was filling Huish's glass, the bottle escaped from his hand and was shattered, and the wine spilt, on the verandah floor. Instant grimness as of death appeared in the face of Attwater; he smote the bell imperiously, and the two brown natives fell into the attitude of attention and stood mute and trembling. There was a moment of silence and hard looks; then followed a few savage words in the native; and, upon a gesture of dismissal, the service proceeded as before. [TET, 95]

Attwater's menace is once again re-established instantaneously and the inquisitive Davis, noticing the fine physiques of the servants who await Attwater's instructions, asks where he has obtained his labour. Attwater informs him that the job of acquiring labour was Symmonds's responsibility; his own, 'was the educational.' [95] Stevenson illustrates the uselessness of the 'education' provided by Attwater: it operates only at the level of domestic chores and serves to establish another distinction predicated on race and class. The Light-Bearer brings his book of etiquette under his arm, metaphorically imposing a European way of life on the indigenous population.

Stevenson shifts the allegiances once again, with Davis, impressed by Attwater's dominion over his servants, now in a position not only of agreement with Attwater, but, moreover, in earnest admiration of his strictness. The significance of shifting allegiances becomes clearer as Stevenson locates his characters around the table: they can change allegiance with ease because they have so much in common. They are different embodiments of the disease-spreading European influence present in the South Seas. Attwater's reaction to Davis's approbation is one of affected weariness:

‘Well, one got the law after a fashion,’ said Attwater. ‘One had to be a number of things. It was sometimes rather a bore.’

‘I should smile!’ said Davis. ‘Rather lively, I should think!’

‘I dare say we mean the same thing,’ said Attwater. ‘However, one way or another, one got it knocked into their heads that they *must* work, and they *did* - until the Lord took them!’ [TET, 96]

The underlying assumptions of racial superiority, never too deeply submerged, appear here under-written by that assurance which characterises the zealous adoption of the Protestant work ethic in wholly undiluted strength: however, the actual work will be undertaken by the indigenous labourer brought to enlightenment by his employer. Stevenson’s insider-outsider relationship to the business of Empire is manifestly in play in this inter-change: he kept workers at Vailima, but he treated them well. Once again, it is clear that it is impossible to remove Stevenson from the late-nineteenth century and turn him into a twenty-first century egalitarian. That said however, beneficent presence or not, he was in the South Pacific as another white overseer and that cannot be ignored.

The whole question of race and social class pervades *The Ebb Tide*, and prevents a reading solely based on questions of an aesthetic nature. The shaping discourse for Stevenson’s late fiction is not that of the tales of high adventure, and it requires further scrutiny of the embedded attitudes to imperialism and the subjugation of other races, to establish the significance of this text for late-nineteenth-century literary studies. Stevenson is attacking the central assumptions of Victorian overseas policy but his approach is to use the device of ironic under-cutting, often focusing on the object of criticism himself, as in the character of Attwater, to cast doubt on the assumptions that otherwise go unchallenged. In this

way, Attwater's arrogance and superiority function to undermine any attractive qualities Herrick, Davis and Huish might perceive in him and associate them with the unacceptable tenets of colonial apologists back in Europe who subscribe to the view that they know what is good for the 'natives.'

Asked by Davis if he has ever had to deal with crime on the island, Attwater gives a lengthy and revealing answer which goes to the core of the paternalistic mindset associated with colonial stewardship. Attwater's narrative begins to engender the impression that Stevenson, in drawing Attwater, has created a character of even greater corruptive potential than Kurtz. Unlike Kurtz, Attwater is not corrupted by the 'darkness' to be encountered by the European in the colonies, he brings that 'darkness' with him. It is present in the framework of the narrative where light is darkness, in the symbol of the blinding light of the lagoon, and in Attwater's blindness to the possibility of any other way but his own. Attwater, as symbol of the corruptive power of Empire, believes himself to be the representative of truth and justice. In a powerful critique of Empire, Stevenson illustrates the operational methods of Attwater's regime:

My justice had been made a fool of; I don't suppose that I was ever angrier. Next day, I had the conch sounded and all hands out before sunrise. One took one's gun, and led the way, with Obsequiousness. He was very talkative; the beggar supposed that all was right now he had confessed; in the old schoolboy phrase, he was plainly "sucking up" to me; full of protestations of good will and good behaviour; to which one answered one really can't remember what. Presently the tree came in sight, and the hanged man. They all burst out lamenting for their comrade in the island way, and Obsequiousness was the loudest of the mourners. He was quite genuine; a noxious creature, without any consciousness of guilt. Well, presently - to make a long story short - one told him to go up the tree. He stared a bit, looked at one with a trouble in his eye, and had a rather sickly smile; but went. He was obedient to the last; he had all the pretty virtues, but the truth

was not in him. So soon as he was up, he looked down, and there was the rifle covering him; and at that he gave a whimper like a dog. You could hear a pin drop; no more keening now. There they all crouched upon the ground, with bulging eyes; there was he in the tree-top, the colour of lead; and between was the dead man, dancing a bit in the air. He was obedient to the last, recited his crime, recommended his soul to God. And then...

Attwater paused, and Herrick who had been listening attentively, made a convulsive movement which upset his glass.

‘And then?’ said the breathless captain.

‘Shot,’ said Attwater. ‘They came to ground together.’ [TET, 98]

Herrick’s reaction indicates his oppositional relationship to Attwater in Stevenson’s symbolic framework: he rejects the zeal for Empire based upon the assumptions of racial superiority that fuel Attwater’s perception of the Imperial project. Herrick is offered a glimpse into the abyss once more, and the sight unnerves him. The moral vacuity that characterises Attwater’s island domain undermines Herrick’s sense of European civilisation as represented by the ubiquitous Virgil. Attwater’s cold and unemotional response parallels the detachment he displays at the shooting of his servant:

‘Your friend appears over-excited,’ remarked Attwater, sitting unmoved but all alert at table.

‘It must be the wine,’ replied the captain. ‘He ain’t no drinking man, you see. I - I think I’ll take him away. A walk’ll sober him up I guess.’

He led him without resistance out of the verandah and into the night, in which they soon melted; but still for some time, as they drew away, his comfortable voice was to be heard soothing and remonstrating, and Herrick answering, at intervals with the mechanical noises of hysteria.

‘E’s like a bloomin’ poultry yard!’ observed Huish, helping himself to wine (of which he spilled a good deal) with gentlemanly ease. ‘A man should learn to beyave at table,’ he added.

‘Rather bad form, is it not?’ said Attwater. ‘Well, well, we are left *lête-à-lête*. A glass of wine with you, Mr Whish!’ [TET, 99]

The shift in allegiances has been effected: Herrick and Davis and Attwater and Huish pair in another, revised, narrative arrangement. The re-figuring of the allegiances is significant because the new partnerships are effectively binary opposites. Davis is convinced that the success of the dinner party prior to Herrick’s outburst is based upon Attwater’s

ignorance of their scheme to rob him. The opposition of scepticism and certainty in this interchange is significant because the roles will be reversed yet again by the end of the narrative. Herrick is almost separated from reason and his attempts to shift Davis on the matter of Attwater's knowledge of their intentions raises issues that once again focus on determinism and free-will:

'Do you think he would have been so easy at table, unless he was prepared?' cried Herrick. 'The servants were both armed. He was armed himself; he always is, he told me. You will never deceive his vigilance. Davis, I know it! It's all up, I tell you, and keep telling you, and proving it. All up: all up! There's nothing for it, there's nothing to be done. All gone - life, honour, love. Oh, my God! my God! why was I born?'

Another pause followed upon this outburst.

The captain put his hands to his brow.

'Another thing!' he broke out. 'Why did he tell you all this? Seems like madness to me!'

Herrick shook his head with gloomy iteration. 'You wouldn't understand if I were to tell you,' he said.

'I guess I can understand any blame' thing that you can tell me,' said the captain.

'Well, then, he's a fatalist,' said Herrick. [TET, 102]

Davis fails to understand the term, and Stevenson draws lines of distinction once more between Herrick and Davis, emphasising the gulf between them as abstract thinker and pragmatist. Herrick projects Attwater as a phenomenon, rather as Marlow does with Kurtz, but Herrick's appraisal of Attwater is as a character much more to be feared than Kurtz whose own degeneration is Marlow's source of horror. Attwater presents a different face, a face set in its certainty of justification. In this sense, Attwater can be read as the symbolic representation of every negative facet of imperialism. The arrogance, assumptions of racial superiority, rapacious exploitation of material goods, and a total lack of self-examination with regard to these activities results in a character at least as disturbing as Kurtz.

The quartette is an illusion. It functions as a narrative device to obscure the shifting pairings that Stevenson elaborately constructs around Attwater, Herrick, Davis and Huish to replicate the unstable alliances formed, and abandoned, by the native population of Samoa on the one hand, and on the part of the European powers on the other. Attwater alone, represents any stability and it is such a grotesque manifestation of unbounded megalomania that is more frightening than the anarchic alternatives.

Herrick's pilgrim's progress is fraught with difficulties and dangers and the density of the imagery of opposition and struggle has a symbolic equivalence as Herrick, once more repelled and attracted by Attwater, forces himself to return to the scene of his humiliation. He arrives on the beach once again: his arrival on the beach at Papeete, and the first landfall on Zacynthos are as nothing compared to the utter desolation Herrick experiences now:

With the consequences of his acts, he saw himself implacably confronted for the duration of life: stretched upon a cross, and nailed there with the iron bolts of his own cowardice. He had no tears, he told himself no stories. His disgust with himself was so complete, that even the process of apologetic mythology had ceased. He was like a man cast down from a pillar and every bone broken: he lay there, and admitted the facts, and did not attempt to rise. [TET, 109]

Herrick is thoroughly dispirited and his efforts against the ebbing tide from the beach in the breaking light of a new day, sets up the re-structured alliance with Attwater which follows. The image of margins, of liminal areas as windows of opportunity recurs here and as Herrick looks back to the schooner anchored in the lagoon, he marks another shift in the narrative structure and a new point of departure:

Dawn began to break over the far side of the atoll, the sky brightened, the clouds became dyed with gorgeous colours, the shadows of the night lifted. And suddenly Herrick was aware that the lagoon and the trees wore again their daylight livery; and he saw, on board the *Farallone*, Davis extinguishing the lantern and smoke rising from the galley.

Davis without doubt remarked and recognised the figure on the beach; or perhaps hesitated to recognise it; for after he had gazed a long while from under his hand, he went into the house and fetched a glass. It was very powerful, Herrick had often used it; with an instinct of shame, he hid his face in his hands. [TET, 109]

Attwater announces himself then, at the very lowest ebb of Herrick's despair and as he looks down the barrel of Attwater's Winchester he pathetically appeals to Attwater to 'be merciful and put a bullet through me: it's only a puppy with a broken leg.' [110.] Herrick's humiliation is complete. Having left the schooner to commit suicide, he is once again 'taken at the flood' and beached, helpless, and dependent on a stronger individual. That this individual is Attwater, Stevenson implies, must give cause for concern. The problem with Herrick's inherent weakness is that he will look to the strong man for help even when such an arrangement is destined to exacerbate his difficulties, rather than face the moral issues, and detach himself from Attwater. The recurring theme of attraction and repulsion is again foregrounded as the prodigal Herrick, with no other option available to him, returns with Attwater to his house. Davis witnesses this latest re-figuring of allegiances from the deck of the *Farallone*.

The penultimate chapter, 'David and Goliath', presents the hung-over Huish recovering from his night of excess while Davis attempts to figure out the latest development in the dynamics of their narrative. He has a stolen ship, few provisions and little hope of reaching a port where he will not be jailed. On shore he faces the prospect of Attwater and his armed

retainers: Davis is reconciled to sailing to a cannibal island or back to Papeete when a reminiscence suggests sinister forces:

There came over Davis, from deep down in the roots of his being, or at least from far back among his memories of childhood and innocence, a wave of superstition. This run of ill-luck was something beyond natural; the chances of the game were in themselves more various; it seemed as if the devil must move the pieces. The devil? He heard again the clear note of Attwater's bell ringing abroad into the night and dying away. How if God...?

Briskly he averted his mind. Attwater: that was the point. Attwater had food and a treasure of pearls; escape made possible in the present, riches in the future. They must come to grips with Attwater; the man must die. A smoky heat went over his face, as he recalled the impotent figure he had made last night and the contemptuous speeches he must bear in silence. Rage, shame, and the love of life, all pointed the one way; and only invention halted: how to reach him? had he strength enough? was there any help in that misbegotten packet of bones against the house? [TET, 112]

Paradoxically, Davis is moved to a response by an atavistic impulse rather than by the pragmatic weighing of possibilities he is previously associated with. It is as if Davis now views Attwater in the same way that Herrick perceives him and this change in perspective will subsequently initiate another shift in allegiances. For the moment, Davis attempts to find a solution to the problem of food supplies, but the sense of an oppositional, evil force at work against him, lays open the possibility of conversion to the side of whichever contrary, and perceptively beneficent force may come along.

Stevenson indicates another break in the pattern of allegiances as Davis suggests that he wishes to bring Attwater to heel. The re-formulated arrangement depends on a willing and able protagonist and Huish, the foot-soldier of Empire, immediately concurs with Davis, attempting to figure how Attwater can be overcome. In this respect, the clerk establishes his courage if nothing else and he is the catalyst for the action that will propel the narrative towards a climax of sorts. Huish, correctly, assesses

the four to two imbalance in numbers to be of little importance, remarking that with Attwater taken care of, the rest, including Herrick, will be compliant and no longer a threat. Huish's eagerness for the fight confirms Davis's earlier estimation of him as a 'biter' and he assures the Captain that if he, Davis, can 'take charge of 'Errick and the niggers' [115], then he will take 'care of Hattwater' [115].

Huish is figured as a representative of the common soldier, an embodiment of raw, latent power which can be released with devastating effect and which has nothing of the moralistic agonising of a Herrick, rendered impotent because of the inability to act. As a foot-soldier, Huish demonstrates the very attributes required to win and hold an Empire. The difficulty is, of course, that in order to win, the foot-soldier must first mutiny and the attempt to subvert Attwater's hegemony must, therefore, be based on an illegal act. On another level, Huish may represent an alternative, less civilised class of imperialist, in competition to British interests as represented by Attwater.

The venomous streak in Huish that Stevenson emphasises in the interaction with Attwater once again suggests an Imperial project manned by different, but equally appalling functionaries. The continuing insistence on deception as a key theme is apparent as Huish suggests to Davis that Attwater will be unlikely to gun them down if they land on the island under a flag of truce. This is perhaps an unsafe assumption given the treatment of Attwater's servant, and Stevenson again illustrates the 'biter's' courage. Huish does not specify how he will deal with Attwater, and as Davis is unable to come up with the answer, Huish asks if he really

wants to find out how the deed will be done. The implied suggestion of something terrible increases the tension until Davis is prompted to request an explanation of Huish's intentions:

'This 'ere's vitriol, ³⁰this is,' said he.

The captain stared upon him with a whitening face.

'This is the stuff!' he pursued, holding it up. 'This'll burn to the bone; you'll see it smoke upon him like 'ell-fire! One drop upon 'is bloomin' heyesight, and I'll trouble you for Attwater!'

'No, no, by God!' exclaimed the captain.

'Now, see 'ere, ducky,' said Huish, 'this is my bean-feast, I believe? I'm goin' up to that man single-'anded, I am. 'e's about seven foot 'igh, and I'm five foot one. 'e's a rifle in his 'and, 'e's on the look-out, 'e wasn't born yesterday. This is Dyvid and Goliar, I tell you.' [TET, 116]

Stevenson's choice of vitriol as the preferred weapon to disable Attwater is significant for two reasons. Firstly, it suggests the corruption of science for ulterior purposes because vitriol had medicinal applications and, secondly, vitriol was the substance used by Irish nationalists in acts of civil disobedience against the British in the nineteenth century.

Davis is shocked by Huish's suggestion: the acid is a dreadful weapon and the captain cannot sanction its use. Huish ironically refers to the 'happlication of science' [117] in resolving their difficulties over Attwater but Davis is sickened by the thought of the injuries it will inflict. Huish retorts that the use of a pistol has no more salubrious effect and Davis is forced to admit that Huish alone has the courage to confront Attwater, whose presence is an otherwise immovable obstacle to their survival. Huish is brave, that cannot be denied, but Stevenson implies that his courage is tainted. Seen through the eyes of the captain, there must be an unnatural explanation, but the truth may be more banal:

The captain looked at him. Huish sat there, preening his sinister vanity, glorying in his precedency in evil; and the villainous courage and readiness of the creature shone out of him like a candle from a lantern. Dismay and a kind of respect seized hold on Davis in his own despite. Until

that moment, he had seen the clerk always hanging back, always listless, uninterested and openly grumbling at a word of anything to do; and now, by the touch of an enchanter's wand, he beheld him sitting, girt and resolved, and his face radiant. He had raised the devil, he thought; and asked, who was to control him? and his spirits quailed. [TET, 117]

The complicated arrangement of symbol and counter symbol, and the inversion of accepted symbolic values, surfaces again in this section. The references to light and radiance have associations with evil and, beyond that, Stevenson structures Davis's belief in the devil's involvement as a precursor to his ready acceptance of Attwater's God at his moment of conversion. The acceptance of the devil makes acceptance of God logical: in conventional religious terms, one cannot exist without the other. That the conventional should exist alongside the unconventional is characteristic of the unstable relationships that permeate *The Ebb Tide*, and it is never the case that the next development is either predictable or expected. Davis has perceived Huish to be a whining layabout, but he undergoes a radical transformation to man-of-action, resolute and set on destroying Attwater. Davis is self-aware enough to know that, like Herrick, he cannot galvanise himself to act in the manner of Huish, and so is compelled through necessity to defer to Huish in his appalling proposal.

Huish's confidence in his ability is unsettling to Davis, and he speculates that to feel so confident in the efficacy of this method of maiming someone, Huish must have undertaken it before: Huish simply states that such speculation is fruitless since these are 'private affyres' [118]. The bizarre combination of the clear desire to inflict damage horrific in the extreme, and to be delicate about admitting to past misdemeanours is an insight into the compartmentalised mindset which

can commit a foul act but still be outraged over indelicacy of manners.

Davis is affronted by Huish's straightforward aggression:

A shock of repulsion struck and shook the captain; a scream rose almost to his lips; had he uttered it, he might have cast himself at the same moment on the debile body of Huish, might have picked him up, and flung him down, and wiped the cabin with him, in a frenzy of cruelty that seemed half moral. But the moment passed; and the abortive crisis left the man weaker. The stakes were so high - the pearls on the one hand, starvation and shame on the other. Ten years of pearls! The imagination of Davis translated them into a new, glorified existence for himself and his family. The seat of this new life must be in London; there were deadly reasons against Portland, Maine; and the pictures that came to him were of English manners. He saw his boys marching in the procession of a school, with gowns on, an usher marshalling them and reading as he walked in a Greek book. He was installed in a villa, semi-detached; the name, *Rosemore*, on the gate-posts. In a chair on the gravel walk, he seemed to sit smoking a cigar, a blue ribbon in his buttonhole³¹, victor over himself, and circumstances, and the malignity of bankers. He saw the parlour with red curtains and shells on the mantelpiece - and with the fine inconsistency of visions, mixed a grog at the mahogany table ere he turned in. With that the *Farallone* gave one of those aimless and nameless movements which (even on an anchored ship and even in the most profound calm) remind us of the mobility of fluids; and he was back again under the cover of the house, the fierce daylight besieging it all round and glowing in the chinks, and the clerk, in a rather airy attitude, awaiting his decision. [TET, 118-19]

Davis's reverie sheds light on a number of assumptions central to the thematics of *The Ebb Tide*: the most obvious is the belief that material goods belong with whoever is strong enough to take them. Again, Stevenson emphasises an attitude lying at the core of the Imperial project and subverts it as part of his anti-Imperial critique. Attwater's collection of pearls may be an interesting ethical consideration in their own right, but Davis appears to be untroubled by stealing them and buying a London residence on the proceeds. The reference to London as Davis's chosen home is an interesting allusion to the re-locating of wealth taken from the colonies by ethically compromised means and used for indulgent living back at the heart of Empire. Davis dreams of a soft life away from the world of men. His membership of the Temperance Movement, denoted by

his buttonhole ribbon is undercut by his fancy for 'grog' before bedtime; the image Stevenson creates is of a socially-aware citizen anxious to maintain a reputation for public rectitude, but inclined to enjoy the stuff he has publicly renounced. In a heavily ironic vignette highlighting the double standards Stevenson deplored, Davis is charged with the same hypocrisy Herrick levels at Attwater; the framework is being altered to accept the next re-structuring of allegiances.

Before that can be effected, Stevenson introduces a device to allow Huish access to Attwater. Huish dictates a letter to Davis in which he addresses Attwater and admits that he and Davis are finished: significantly, Huish dictates as if Davis was the author in order to enable Huish to act as go-between between the captain and Attwater. The significance of the letter as a means of deception takes the narrative back to the calaboose and to the beachcombers' letters home. They too, were filled with lies and fantasy and the circularity of representational significance is evident in Stevenson's deployment of the letter as a more than a narrative device. Davis's reluctance to participate in the scheme is the basis of another moral issue and it involves once again '*akrasia*', the particular weakness Plato wished to see eliminated from the Republic. The incapacity to act morally has implications for every consequential act, and Davis's passivity will have repercussions beyond his expectations. It may be suggested therefore, that however 'grimy' Stevenson found the writing of *The Ebb Tide*, he produced a text which is profoundly moral: that it is so critical of the conventional morality of the day perhaps accounts for the hostile reaction of its first readers. The dilemma facing

Davis is related in the main to his requirement to go along with a scheme to which he is committed only on grounds of self-interest, and this greatly complicates the moral issue, as Stevenson shows:

The captain had come upon this errand for any one of a dozen reasons, the last of which was the desire for its success. Superstition rules all men; semi-ignorant and gross natures like that of Davis, it rules utterly. For murder, he had been prepared; but this horror of the medicine in the bottle went beyond him, and he seemed to himself to be parting the last strands that united him to God. The boat carried him on to reprobation, to damnation; and he suffered himself to be carried, passively consenting, silently bidding farewell to his better self and his hopes. [TET, 121]

If the hopes to which the narrator refers are those relating to Davis's plans to use Attwater's pearls to secure material wealth in England, then a significant amount of self-deception is practised by the captain; the 'farewell to his better self' is also, presumably, long established. It becomes clear that even once embarked on this scheme, however reluctantly, Davis is incapable of self-knowledge: he abjures any awareness, such as Herrick or Attwater most definitely have, of the famous dicta of the Delphic oracle: 'Know thyself' and 'To thine ownself be true.' His predicament is to be placed in a morally dubious endeavour in company with Huish. This particular pairing is already doomed to failure, as Huish himself appears to suspect:

Huish sat by his side in towering spirits that were not wholly genuine. Perhaps as brave a man as ever lived, brave as a weasel, he must still reassure himself with the tones of his own voice; he must play his part to exaggeration; he must out-Herod Herod, insult all that was respectable, and brave all that was formidable, in a kind of desperate wager with himself. So the young soldier may jest as he goes into battle; so perhaps, of old, the highwayman blasphemed on the scaffold. [TET, 121]

As Huish talks up a sense of bravado, the captain is engaged in prayer and as Huish reminisces about a quotation he had written in his Bible, "Thou Gawd seest me!" He promises God a show when he confronts

Attwater. The irony of Huish's remark is, Stevenson appears to suggest, that God *has* seen the outrages perpetrated in the name of religion and in the name of Empire. Huish's lack of self-awareness is a metaphor for the blindness of the participants in the Imperial project and the over-powering irony is that Huish intends to blind Attwater. Stevenson prepares the way for Davis's conversion as he describes Davis outraged by Huish's blasphemy. The pairings of Attwater and Herrick and Huish and Davis undergo one last, convulsive shift. The image created by the former pairing on the beach is striking:

Herrick and Attwater, both armed with Winchesters, had appeared out of the grove behind the figurehead; and to either hand of them, the sun glistened upon two metallic objects, locomotory like men, and occupying in the economy of these creatures the places of heads - only the heads were faceless. To Davis, hit between wind and water, his mythology appeared to have come alive, and Tophet to be vomiting demons. [TET, 122-3]

Stevenson positions Herrick by the figurehead, as Huish approaches, the jar of vitriol concealed in the palm of his hand. Attwater orders Huish to retreat some distance:

The devil, at this staggering disappointment, looked out of Huish's face, and Attwater was swift to suspect. He frowned, he stared on the little man, and considered. Why should he be creeping nearer? The next moment, his gun was at his shoulder.

'Kindly oblige me by opening your hands. Open your hands wide - let me see the fingers spread, you dog - throw down that thing you're holding!' he roared, his rage and certitude increasing together.

And then, at almost the same moment, the indomitable Huish decided to throw, and Attwater pulled the trigger. There was scarce the difference of a second between the two resolves, but it was in favour of the man with the rifle; and the jar had not yet left the clerk's hand, before the ball shattered both. For the twinkling of an eye, the wretch was in hell's agonies, bathed in liquid flames, a screaming bedlamite. And then a second and more merciful bullet stretched him dead. [TET, 126]

The speed of Attwater's reaction leaves Davis unable to move, hanging onto the figurehead with his hands behind his back as if incapable of facing her. His inability to face Britannia is deeply significant in light of

what follows. Attwater quickly makes the discovery of the vitriol and gives Davis notice that he will kill him after Davis has made his peace with God. The correlation of justice and detached ruthlessness is once again deployed as a powerful metaphor for the under-pinning assumptions that govern Attwater's Empire. Davis declines to prepare himself for eternity, in light of his mission:

Attwater fired; there came a spasmodic movement of the victim, and immediately above the middle of his forehead, a black hole marred the whiteness of the figurehead. A dreadful pause; then again the report, and the solid sound and jar of the bullet in the wood; and this time the captain had felt the wind of it along his cheek. A third shot, and he was bleeding from one ear; and along the levelled rifle Attwater smiled like a Red Indian.

The cruel game of which he was the puppet, was now clear to Davis; three times he had drunk of death, and he must look to drink of it seven times more before he was despatched. He held up his hand.

'Steady!' he cried, 'I'll take your sixty seconds.' [TET, 126-7]

Davis is capable only of a brief exhortation to God to look after his children, and as he looks down the barrel of Attwater's Winchester he implores him to end his misery. Attwater then asks Davis if that is the extent of his prayer, and clearly the expectation is that Davis will join Huish. However, Attwater's reaction suggests further insight, indeed it suggests an ability to see into Davis's inner thoughts:

'So?' said Attwater, resting the butt of his rifle on the ground. 'Is that done? Is your peace made with heaven? Because it is with me. Go, and sin no more, sinful father! And remember that whatever you do to others, God shall visit it again a thousandfold upon your innocents.'

The wretched Davis came staggering forward from his place against the figurehead, fell upon his knees, and waved his hands, and fainted.

When he came to himself again, his head was on Attwater's arm; and close by stood one of the men in divers' helmets holding a bucket of water, from which the late executioner now laved his face. The memory of that dreadful passage returned upon him in a clap; again he saw Huish lying dead, again he seemed to himself to totter on the brink of an unplumbed eternity. With trembling hands, he seized hold of the man whom he had come to slay; and his voice broke from him like that of a child among the nightmares of fever: 'Oh! isn't there no mercy? Oh! What must I do to be saved?'

'Ah!' thought Attwater, 'here is the true penitent.' [TET, 127]

Davis is no longer turning towards Attwater's God, but he is turning to Attwater as God. Stevenson is explicit in his structuring of the symbolic significance of the terrible figure that stands for Empire. The impression of Davis as anything other than an impotent slave of Attwater is difficult to sustain: Huish is dead but the hollow, meaningless existence which falls to Davis is a living-death. He has been forgiven by Attwater and told to sin no more and the irony that underpins this exchange is striking: Stevenson has overturned conventional morality in the concluding section of 'David and Goliath', and has the apogee of evil acting as God. Attwater fires several bullets into the figurehead, the symbolic Britannia, as if to denote a sacrifice on the altar of Empire. Stevenson seems to suggest that any value or any possible benefit that can be accrued by the European presence is ultimately undermined by the greed and self-interest that accompanies all colonialist activity. Attwater is, arguably, a more extreme example of this phenomenon than anyone seen either in the earlier Stevenson texts, or in any Conrad texts and, consequently, he merits some further consideration.

The employment of Attwater as pearl fisher is very significant because Stevenson, already established in Samoa and knowledgeable about the indigenous industries, must certainly have known that pearl-diving as practised by the native population was selective, and because of the lack of diving equipment, necessarily limited in scale. Attwater's commercial diving potential is massive. Ten diving-suits means an operation on a truly industrial scale, and the detritus left over from such a venture is hugely disproportionate to the material recovered: in short, it is a process that

involves colossal waste. The process functions as a powerful metaphor for Western plundering of colonial assets and represents dispossession on a massive scale. The alleged civilising message brought to the islands, here personified by Attwater, the ultimate evangelical, is a cover for blatant exploitation; the destruction of the work-force by a disease brought to the South Seas by Europeans underpins this view. This reading, of course, challenges nineteenth-century views of colonial involvement but the nature of the 'history' argued herein is no less stable than that which may be found in an historical text of the period.

The final section of *The Ebb Tide*, 'A Tail Piece', is problematic because Stevenson has effected a final shift in allegiances that places Davis in the position of a suppliant penitent, in Herrick's terms 'Attwater's spoiled and darling pet penitent' [130], yet also leaves Herrick stranded without any real purpose. Having been taken half way round the world, Herrick is of no use to himself, or to Attwater and most certainly he is of no help to the *kanakas*. Davis has taken refuge in obsessive prayer and has effectively opted out of any agreement to claim the insurance on the *Farallone*. Herrick finally destroys the schooner by setting fire to it in the lagoon, and the circularity in narrative terms is interesting given Stevenson's description of the lagoon in the opening section of 'The Pearl Fisher': 'the isle was like the rim of a great vessel sunk in the waters.' [68]

The *Farallone* lies at the bottom of the lagoon, as incapable of escape as Davis or Herrick. The force that has opposed their endeavours is preparing to welcome back his own vessel, the *Trinity Hall*, named for his

old Cambridge college and the only agency of escape for Herrick. In the dialogue with Herrick which concludes the text, Davis makes clear his intention to remain on the island, and in response to Herrick's amazement says:

‘Now, Mr Herrick, don't say that,’ said the captain gently, ‘when you know he don't make no difference between us. But, Oh! Why not be one of us? Why not come to Jesus right away, and let's meet in yon beautiful land? There's just the one thing wanted: just say “Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief!” and he'll fold you in his arms. You see, I know! I been a sinner myself!’ [TET, 130]

The Ebb Tide then, does not offer the conventional denouement of adventure fiction: at least one of the characters, Herrick, is incapable of adopting the lifestyle of Attwater's island; he must catch the next tide and be carried wherever it may take him. Stevenson describes two possibilities, neither of which he appears to find particularly attractive: the life of zealotry under the megalomaniac Attwater, or the choice to become, once again, human flotsam and meet the next flood tide.

The under-currents of ‘The Beach of Falesá’ are pulled into clearer focus in this complex text and suggest that Stevenson's unease with European activity in the South Pacific was at its most de-stabilising during the writing of *The Ebb Tide*. Stevenson produced in *The Ebb Tide* a radically different work from that which he had attempted before and the extent to which Conrad appears to have adapted its structure and thematics for his novel *Victory*, is testimony enough to the esteem in which the text was regarded by Stevenson's contemporaries. It may even be the case that Stevenson surpasses Conrad's achievement by producing a work of greater coherence and of greater enigmatic impact. *The Ebb Tide*, building on the anti-imperialist critique begun in ‘The Beach of

Falesa', and using formal and symbolic tropes of proto-Modernism, is the text that places Stevenson alongside Conrad on Jameson's fault line.

¹ Alasdair Fowler, 'Parables of Adventure: The Debatable Novels of Robert Louis Stevenson', in *Nineteenth Century Scottish Fiction: A Critical Anthology*, ed. by Ian Campbell (Manchester: Carcanet New Press, 1979), pp. 105-29.

² Alan Sandison, *Robert Louis Stevenson and the Appearance of Modernism* (London: Macmillan, 1996).

³ Cedric Watts, 'The Ebb Tide and Victory', *Conradiana*, 28, (1996) 133-137 (p.133)

⁴ *The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson*, ed. by Bradford A. Booth and Ernest Mehew, 8 vols (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1994-5), VIII, 103.

⁵ *ibid.*, 107

⁶ Robert Louis Stevenson, *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde and Other Stories*, ed. and with an 'Introduction' by Jenni Calder (London: Penguin, 1979).

⁷ Robert Louis Stevenson, *The Ebb Tide: A Trio and A Quartette*, ed. by Peter Hinchcliffe and Catherine Kerrigan (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995), p.3. All subsequent references are to this edition and are given in brackets in the text.

⁸ Alasdair Fowler, 'Parables of Adventure: The Debatable Novels of Robert Louis Stevenson', in *Nineteenth Century Scottish Fiction: A Critical Anthology*, ed. by Ian Campbell (Manchester: Carcanet New Press, 1979), pp. 105-29 (p.116).

⁹ William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, IV. 3. 216-19.

¹⁰ A purao resembles a fig tree.

¹¹ Alan Sandison, *Robert Louis Stevenson and the Appearance of Modernism* (London: Macmillan, 1996), p.324. All subsequent references are to this edition and are given in brackets in the text.

¹² The reference is to Beethoven's Fifth Symphony in C Minor, a work of heroic sympathy. It is ironic that Herrick should associate with it in these circumstances.

¹³ *memor querela*: a reference to the Odes of Horace. The poet refers to a lament to the memory of one departed.

¹⁴ Reference to Virgil's *Aeneid*: Herrick means he would have been luckier had he died at home.

¹⁵ *Ich trage unerträgliches*: 'I bear the unbearable'. The reference is to the poem 'Die Heimkehr' by the German-Jewish poet, Heinrich Heine.

¹⁶ *Du, stolzes Herz, du hast es ja gewollt*: 'You, proud heart, you have what you desired.' Herrick refers to the same Heine poem.

¹⁷ RLS visited the Marquesas onboard the *Casco* during July, 1888.

¹⁸ Any progressive wasting disease, but commonly used to describe pulmonary tuberculosis.

¹⁹ Robert Louis Stevenson, *In the South Seas* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1912), pp.26-27. All subsequent references are to this edition and are given in brackets in the text.

²⁰ Frank McLynn, *Robert Louis Stevenson: A Biography* (London: Hutchinson, 1993), p.320.

²¹ An Unsigned Review, 'Speaker', 28 September 1894, x, 362-63 in *Robert Louis Stevenson: The Critical Heritage*, ed. by Paul Maixner (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), p. 458.

²² Here, Huish uses a term from the ritual of Freemasonry which signifies probity. The Scottish Ritual was, and is, based in Edinburgh and Stevenson's association of Huish with the intricacies of Masonry may be an oblique attack on this bastion of the Establishment.

²³ The reference is to the *Directory for the Navigation of the South Pacific* by A.G. Findlay. Stevenson had a copy of this essential guide for navigators of the South Seas.

²⁴ Fowler, p.117.

²⁵ Fowler, p.118.

²⁶ The reference to which Stevenson alludes is: 'now shady Zacynthos appears in the midst of the flood.' Virgil, *Aeneid*, II, 270.

²⁷ Fowler, p.122.

²⁸ The male and female sex organs, regarded with great respect by the Hindus.

²⁹ *The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson*, VIII, 361-366, (p. 365).

³⁰ The 'vitriol' to which Huish refers is concentrated hydrochloric acid. It was used in Fenian disturbances in Ireland. Huish's proposed use of it in *The Ebb Tide* supports a view of him as the 'Hyde-figure', based upon the stereotypical image of the Irish 'Hooligan' favoured by sections of the British press in the 1880s. For a full discussion of this topic, see: R.F. Foster, *Paddy and Mr Punch: Connections in Irish and English History* (London: Allen Lane, 1993). Stevenson's avowed opposition to Irish Home Rule during the 1880s may help to sustain this reading of Huish.

³¹ The symbol of the Temperance Movement.

Stevenson, Conrad and the proto-Modernist Novel

The literature of the closing years of the nineteenth century presents a bifurcated view of Empire. Early Modernist writers such as Stevenson and Conrad experiment with formal arrangements within which the theme of a declining Empire may be figured. At the same time, writers like Kipling appear to be more strident about the Imperial project the less secure its future. At the core of proto-Modernist writing is a sense of the Empire as a corruptive force spreading disease both literal and metaphorical throughout its geographical limits. The present study will conclude with consideration of the links between *The Ebb Tide* and *Victory* and will seek to examine the anti-Imperialist themes present in the Stevenson text as they re-surface in Conrad's novel.

Stevenson's proto-Modernist critique of Empire outlined in 'The Beach of Falesá' and in *The Ebb Tide* provides the critical framework for a discussion of Conrad's *Victory*. It will be argued here that the Conrad text resembles the structural and thematic arrangements of *The Ebb Tide*. Analysis of these texts is set within the wider context of Empire writing in the Victorian *fin-de-siecle*.

Conrad began work on *Victory: An Island Tale* in April, 1912: that is to say, before his first popularly acclaimed work *Chance* was published in 1914, and twenty years after Stevenson's death in 1894. Stevenson's South Seas fiction did not achieve great approbation from critics in Britain as might be

expected because of its anti-imperialist stance, but it was well received in the United States; Conrad's *Chance* was also acclaimed by the American reading public. The reason for this difference in critical reception in Britain and the United States is closely linked to the concerns of the period. The late 1890s saw the confluence of several key factors that would create a positive response to literature of this kind. A reaction against imperialism was already underway in the United States by the time *McClure's Magazine* published Kipling's poem, 'The White Man's Burden' in 1899. The timing of this publication is critical because it occurred at a moment when the American-Philippine War began (February 4, 1899) and the United States Senate ratified the Treaty of Paris that officially ended the Spanish-American War ceding Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Philippines to the United States. The terms of the Treaty also placed Cuba under United States control. A perception was steadily growing among American intellectuals that the substitution of Spanish imperialism by an American variant was an unacceptable development.

Conrad, in common with Stevenson, found the American market more sympathetic to an anti-imperialist text and, as a consequence, he enjoyed greater success than had hitherto been the case in relation to his earlier work. The formula Conrad adopts in *Victory* is remarkably similar to that employed by Stevenson in *The Ebb Tide*, and the important areas of similarity between the texts can be held to occur in respect of location, thematic resemblance and narrative structure. In common with Stevenson, Conrad is interested in the

relationship between European and indigenous cultures and the exchanges that occur as these cultures collide in the face of colonial exploitation.

Victory is located in the Malay archipelago of *Almayer's Folly* and *An Outcast of the Islands* and, in this later text, Conrad returns to his early setting not simply in a geographical sense, but also in thematic terms. Theme and setting are inextricably linked through the desire to account for the impact of imperialism and so the novel's setting is central to the thematic issues at the heart of Conrad's project. The narrative opens with Axel Heyst's arrival in the archipelago: like Herrick, he has been 'taken at the flood' halfway around the world to the island of Samburan. The parallels with *The Ebb Tide* can be established even in the opening paragraphs: the remote island of Samburan replicates Attwater's island, existing as it does almost as a mirage. More significant, perhaps, is the early mention of Heyst's *raison d'être*: he is befriended by Morrison, a sea-captain, a trader like Lingard of the earlier novels. Following an episode in which he financially assists Morrison, Heyst is persuaded to become his business-partner. In short, Heyst becomes part of the colonialist drive for wealth. His medium is coal rather than the pearls accumulated by Attwater, but the similarities more than outweigh the differences since both rely on the natural resources of indigenous populations. The exploitation of the material wealth of Zacynthos, so central to the thematic structure of *The Ebb Tide*, is mirrored in *Victory* through the activities of the mining company. Conrad emphasises the importance of the

assumptions underlying the acquisition of these resources in the opening few paragraphs of the text:

There is, as every schoolboy knows in this scientific age, a very close chemical relation between coal and diamonds. It is the reason, I believe, why some people allude to coal as "black diamonds." Both these commodities represent wealth; but coal is a much less portable form of property. There is, from that point of view, a deplorable lack of concentration in coal. Now, if a coal-mine could be put into one's waistcoat pocket – but it can't! At the same time, there is a fascination in coal, the supreme commodity of the age in which we are camped like bewildered travellers in a garish, unrestful hotel. And I suppose those two considerations, the practical and the mystical, prevented Heyst – Axel Heyst – from going away.¹

Conrad's association of coal and diamonds establishes the importance of materialism at the root of Heyst's project almost immediately, and it is in relation to his role as representative of the colonial drive that he will be viewed. Unlike Attwater, Heyst is not successful in his venture and so no direct parallel suggests itself with Stevenson's 'God-with-a-Winchester-rifle'. However, several parallels do exist as will be demonstrated in this discussion and key linkages exist as a result of common themes and structures to join these texts in an important relationship. The published critical material that seeks to analyse the links between *Victory* and *The Ebb Tide* is limited and only Cedric Watts's short essay '*The Ebb Tide and Victory*'² seeks to discuss possible resemblances between the texts. In this essay, Watts confines himself to particularities and avoids any discussion of underlying ideological premises, the effect of which is to simultaneously acknowledge, while actually disregarding, the significance of common ground beyond that of straight-forward narrative similarity. Watts's essay creates the impression that Stevenson's text is only superficially linked to *Victory*. The present study will

seek to establish the importance of the Stevenson text as it informs *Victory*. This evaluation forms an important link in the process of re-figuring Stevenson's South Seas fiction within a proto-Modernist context. In order to validate such a position, and to re-assess the importance of the links between the two texts, analysis of the points of connection will be necessary. Stevenson and Conrad contribute to a genre that, in an innovative manner, casts doubt on the assumptions under-pinning the grand narrative of late-nineteenth-century fiction. Perhaps the difficulty in accepting that such a relationship does exist between Stevenson and Conrad is predicated on the assumption that they could never be accepted as equal partners. This is an assumption that the present dissertation seeks to interrogate as part of its re-evaluation of the early Modernist fiction of these important writers.

The narrative substance of *Victory* is not particularly complex and an account of the action can be undertaken very briefly. In essence, this is a tale concerning the rescue of a woman from a predatory male, her removal to an island idyll where she and her partner live an untroubled existence until the arrival of a trio of low-life beachcombers. The central character, Axel Heyst, is an English-educated Swede, who in common with Lingard, has travelled and traded among the islands of the Far East. The resemblance with Herrick is established by their common isolation in an alien and threatening environment. Despite their English education and European pedigree, neither Heyst nor Herrick has the ruthlessness of an Attwater-like figure to follow the Imperial project through. Heyst's series of false starts links him closely to

Herrick and the impression is created of an ineffectual son not quite competent enough to join the family business. The business he is involved in fails and business as a metaphor for Empire is suggested, in a parallel of Attwater's pearl fishing venture. The fundamental difference is, of course, that Attwater is successful in terms of establishing a power base on his island and Heyst is not.

The trio of Jones, Ricardo and Pedro, paralleling the beachcombers in *The Ebb Tide* and excited by Schomberg's suggestion that there is buried treasure, arrive on Heyst's island. The resulting combination of Heyst, Lena, and the trio on Samburan leads to a conflict of purpose and a closure bordering on the melodramatic ensues with Lena dying, having been shot while protecting Heyst. Heyst commits suicide and the trio destroy themselves having fallen out. In short, this is an apparently simple, and at times implausible narrative.

There are several points of contact with *The Ebb Tide*. For example, the presence of natural resources and the exploitation of them by external agencies provides the subject matter of the opening paragraphs of *Victory*. Like Attwater's pearls, the coal mentioned by the narrator of *Victory* may be read as a metaphor for all imperialist exploitation, but there is a significant difference between pearls and coal, or indeed between diamonds and coal. The point is that the value attributed to coal and to diamonds is fundamentally different. Coal is required to generate heat and light, and in the nineteenth century it is of integral importance in the drive for power, in every sense of that term, as nations compete for economic primacy. The significance of the

value placed on diamonds is somewhat less obvious, being as it is based on a more nebulous conception of what is valuable. Paradoxically, diamonds are at their least valuable when they are of practical use: that is, when they are used in an industrial context to cut or to shape other materials. Their value increases in direct proportion to their uselessness: that is, when they reach the point at which they become decorative baubles for rich women, when their value may be immeasurable. The parallels between *Victory* and *The Ebb Tide* become clearer here, as the exploitative endeavours of Heyst's Tropical Belt Coal Company represent the same metonymic association with capitalism as Attwater's pearl-fishing enterprise. The point is that value is both arbitrary and, significantly in this fiction, promulgated by systems alien to the culture in which these Western economic ventures function. What emerges from a comparative study of these texts is that to look only for *narrative* resemblances is to overlook far more important issues that bear in on the thematics of both writers as they address questions of morality in the context of colonial exploitation.

Cedric Watts's essay is based on a reading of *The Ebb Tide* and *Victory* which overlooks some important thematic links that would allow Stevenson and Conrad to be viewed as co-critics of the Imperial project. Watts appears defensive and eager to disassociate two writers who clearly share common interests and a core concern of the present study is to re-assess Stevenson's contribution to the development of the early Modernist without attempting to denigrate Conrad in the process. Watts writes:

During Joseph Conrad's lifetime, reviewers of his work frequently compared him to Robert Louis Stevenson. In view of the subsequent decline in Stevenson's fortunes and the rise in Conrad's, those reviewers later seemed, in retrospect, rather naïve. Generally they noticed superficial resemblances but overlooked important differences. The superficial resemblances are easy to discern. Both Stevenson and Conrad deal with seafarers, with adventurers in exotic locations, with ambiguous characters and with outcasts of various kinds. The differences include the following: Conrad is usually more sophisticated and intelligent, with a wider range of moral, philosophical and particularly political awareness; and he was richer in technical and linguistic resources, greater imaginative panache, and, as a realist, is more persuasively and astutely observant. Nevertheless, though Conrad had grounds for regarding Stevenson as an inferior writer, there is evidence that he was sometimes indebted to Stevenson's work – or at least to a novel in which that author was a collaborator. [TETV, 133]

Watts's article appears to look for points of departure rather than points of intersection and to acknowledge superficial likenesses without ever conceding fundamentally connective tropes. The assumptions in Watts's argument require some examination. His technique involves presenting an argument in an apparently objective manner while using terms that rely on value judgments themselves problematic in relation to substantiation. References to superior intelligence and sophistication are partisan, and lead the reader to conclude that Watts relies on personal preference rather than any set of observable criteria when evaluating these two writers. The defensiveness is peculiar because Conrad's fortunes did rise following the end of the First World War. However, that situation is perhaps attributable to the changing attitudes that came with peace rather than to any inherent changes in the structures and thematics of Conrad's writing. The present study argues that Stevenson, ahead of most of his contemporaries, realised that the intrusion into indigenous cultures by western capitalism was a blight and he stated that

view at a time when it was neither acceptable, nor indeed widely acknowledged. Stevenson's subsequent decline is, therefore, the result of the production of texts that openly challenge the assumptions of late-nineteenth-century racial theories and the supremacy of one culture over another. Of course, the relative fortunes, or reputations, of Stevenson and Conrad are also linked to the simple expedient of survival. Conrad was still alive when the mood changed regarding anti-imperialist literature following the First World War, by which time Stevenson's 'The Beach of Falesá' and *The Ebb Tide* had dropped from view and had subsequently been pigeon-holed elsewhere.

Conrad follows Stevenson's text assiduously enough to suggest that he did not consider Stevenson as 'inferior' a writer as Watts contends. Conrad incorporates several of the structural and thematic elements of *The Ebb Tide* into *Victory*. The adoption of the remote island as a symbol of Empire, the trio of villains, the obsessive insistence on gentlemanly behaviour, the villains' plans to kill the island 'ruler', having first stolen his riches, suggests something more substantial than Watts's perception of 'merely intermittent resemblances.' The representation of the trio in *Victory* along lines corresponding to those used by Stevenson in *The Ebb Tide* indicates a rather more comprehensive re-figuring by Conrad than Watts concedes to be the case.

The parallels between the texts may demonstrate thematic connections of importance. Conrad may be observed to share an outlook on imperialism with Stevenson and so the adoption of tropes from a text that stands as a paradigm

of anti-imperialist writing is hardly surprising. The political outlooks of Stevenson and Conrad are not so fundamentally different, especially as they inform their writings on Empire and exploitation and therefore the thematic links are, perhaps, to be expected. The re-working of the central tropes of an earlier text in a later work is not uncommon as, for example, Jean Rhys's later re-figuring of *Jane Eyre* illustrates. The difference is, of course, that Rhys tells the tale from a different narrative standpoint, from the point-of-view of the Other. Conrad's adoption of the key elements of *The Ebb Tide* is framed within the same set of cultural assumptions which inform Stevenson's writing.

The concern for indigenous cultures demonstrated by Stevenson both in 'The Beach of Falesá' and *The Ebb Tide*, is shared by Conrad in *Victory* and his suspicion of unregulated European commerce parallels Stevenson's own anxieties regarding the corrosive influence of Western capitalism.

In order to examine in more detail how these links are established in the texts under examination, several specific points require development. In terms of the character parallels, Heyst enjoys a similar status to Attwater as the lone figure in control of the remote island, but he also shares Herrick's sense of the absurdity of life. Heyst is, like Herrick, detached from and disenchanted with humankind. A direct parallel with Attwater's evangelical fervour is absent. It is re-figured in Heyst's scepticism but the effect is the same: it de-sensitizes the character to the plight of the people around him. In Heyst's case, this becomes apparent in his relationship with Lena. Heyst arrives at the view that

appearances above everything else are what count and so he projects a hollowness and preoccupation with externals which pre-figures the 'modern' existential hero. However, in this sense, Heyst resembles Herrick in his inability to commit himself to anything or to anybody: he is suspended in his own inactivity. In one sense then, Conrad seems to re-figure the 'island ruler' Heyst in a composite of characteristics drawn from both Attwater and Herrick. There is no requirement here to deem the result of this re-working superior or inferior. It is different, but it clearly draws on the earlier text in a fundamental way. When Wang departs, Heyst loses his conviction, and the resemblances to Herrick are marked:

'Here I am on a Shadow inhabited by Shades. How helpless a man is against the Shades! How is one to intimidate, persuade, resist, assert oneself against them? I have lost all belief in realities...Lena, give me your hand.'

She looked at him surprised, uncomprehending.

'Your hand,' he cried.

She obeyed; he seized it with avidity as if eager to raise it to his lips, but halfway up released his grasp. They looked at each other for a time.

'What's the matter, dear?' she whispered timidly.

'Neither force nor conviction,' Heyst muttered wearily to himself. 'How am I to meet this charmingly simple problem?' (V, 350)

Heyst experiences the same sense of emasculation as that experienced by Herrick in the opening chapters of *The Ebb Tide* as the beachcombers face up to the realities of their failure. In common with Herrick, Heyst is only able to ruminate on his unhappy condition: he can do nothing to improve his own and, by extension, Lena's situation. Heyst's ineffectualness and the inability to act he demonstrates is an important element in Daphna Erdinast-Vulcan's analysis of the novel:

Axel Heyst is the *fin-de-siècle* protagonist who realizes that appearances are all that one can ask for or have in this world (p. 204); who scorns life – or rather ‘what people call by that name’ – for the ‘fatal imperfection’ of its gifts which, he believes, ‘makes of them a delusion and a snare’ (p. 212); who has managed to ‘refine everything away’ by turning the earth to ‘a shadow’, who has lost ‘all belief in realities’³

Heyst’s dislocation from the increasingly threatening short-term future is a near mirror image of Herrick’s dysfunctional response in the calaboose when he is occupied in scratching the opening phrase of Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony on the wall rather than seeking a means to survival [TET, 24]. The parallel is interesting as both examples emphasise the dislocation experienced by two cultured Europeans rendered useless by their translation to a foreign location. As symbols of declining Empire, both Herrick and Heyst stand diametrically opposite Second Lieutenant Bobby Wick, Kipling’s hero in ‘Only a Subaltern’⁴, committed to the service of Queen and Country in India, and brought down by cholera as he attempts to raise morale among his sick troops. The sickness in the Kipling tale, a cholera epidemic in an English regiment in the Indian Army, functions as the backdrop to personal gallantry: in both Stevenson and Conrad, the presence of *malaise*, either physical or moral is linked to the corrosive effects of imperialism. Both Heyst and Herrick suffer from a metaphorical ‘dis-ease’ having been exposed to the realities of life in the Empire and neither are, unlike the members of their oppositional trios, capable of ignoring the excesses.

The irony that underpins Heyst’s rescue of Lena from the Zangiacomos and from Schomberg, only to land in an even more dangerous predicament, neatly parallels the situation of Herrick as he escapes the calaboose to become

subjected to Attwater's regime on Zycanthos. It may be argued that in this example Conrad goes beyond the creation of casual similarities with the Stevenson text, and suggests a re-figuring of *The Ebb Tide* in a way that establishes a large scale adoption of some of the central elements of the earlier text.

The mixture of realism and symbolism evidenced in *The Ebb Tide* is also a key trope of *Victory* and the combination that did not achieve contemporary approbation for Stevenson, gained Conrad critical approval in the twentieth century. Gary Geddes, in his study entitled *Conrad's Later Novels*, states:

Victory's admirers, including F.R. Leavis, R.W. Stallman, Muriel Bradbrook, and John Palmer, are equally insistent. Bradbrook considers *Victory* the last novel of the middle period, 'and if not the greatest, it is the most firmly modelled, the most boldly wrought.' John Palmer argues that '*Victory* is the high point of Conrad's third period' because it is Conrad's most 'successful allegorizing of his beliefs.' One need not review the vast body of criticism of this novel in its entirety to be struck by the distance which separates the praisers from the detractors. Even Conrad himself seems to have been given to the use of superlatives in his remarks on *Victory*, describing it as 'a book in which I have tried to grasp at more "life-stuff" than perhaps in any other of my works, and the one of which the appreciation of the public has given me the most pleasure.'⁵

The acclaim of critics such as Leavis in the post-imperial period following the First World War distances the text from Stevenson's *The Ebb Tide*, the product of a forgotten era before 'the war to end wars.' Given Conrad's disparaging rejoinder that he was 'no airy R. L. Stevenson' quoted above, it is understandable that Conrad, and subsequently Conrad scholars such as Watts, should seek to distance *Victory* from *The Ebb Tide* thereby avoiding uncomfortable comparisons. Nevertheless, the similarity of fictional modes outlined above persists and forms a significant element in the process of re-

defining and re-evaluating Stevenson's contribution to the production of the proto-Modernist text.

The most striking connection to *The Ebb Tide* is the appearance of the miscreants on Samburan, driven by greed to relieve Heyst of the riches attributed to him by Schomberg. As composite types they correspond to the patterning of the trio in the Stevenson text. The self-styled Mr Jones appears to resemble aspects of Herrick as the *fin-de-siècle flâneur*, given to lounging and generally disporting himself as a gentleman of leisure. Ricardo has characteristics that link him to Davis, for example the desire, if not the resolve, to carry through a dangerous project. Pedro resembles the simian aspect of Huish: a primordial force held uneasily in check. These re-figured elements stand in close affinity with the characters in *The Ebb Tide* but in terms of the creative interaction undertaken by Conrad, they produce a revised vision of the metaphorical significances pursued by Stevenson some twenty years earlier.

Following Stevenson, Conrad establishes distance between Jones and Ricardo on the basis of social class, and so relegates the uncivilised Pedro to the status of servant. Conrad emphasises the gap between the 'gentleman' and the 'servant' in terms identical to Stevenson in the opposition of Herrick and Huish. Like Stevenson, Conrad challenges some fundamental assumptions inherent in the British social system and in the process calls into question the bases for these assumptions. *Victory* is, in the Conradian canon, the exact equivalent of *The Ebb Tide* in the output of Stevenson: it is a departure from

his earlier work and carries the same mark of disaffection that distinguishes Stevenson's text.

In structural terms the resemblances are clear: the opening section of the novel performs the same function as 'The Trio' in *The Ebb Tide* in that the component parts of the entire text are loosely assembled and in the second, or end section, these components are drawn together. As in *The Ebb Tide*, a series of short chapters conveys the impression of pace which, in spite of *Victory's* greater length, tends to reinforce a sense of similarity. The concluding section of *Victory* is characterised by a similar proximity to melodrama as that evidenced in *The Ebb Tide*. The structural elements of *Victory* are as carefully delineated as Stevenson's text, giving the impression of further interconnections between the texts. Heyst's story is related in a manner akin to that of Herrick; the introverted reflection and sense of bewilderment at being located as they are in alien circumstances undermines both characters and impairs their ability to function effectively. Both texts are characterised by a similar sense of predicament, and both novels associate the concomitant feelings of alienation with the invasion of one culture by another. This theme is central to each of the texts examined in the course of this study. It is important to note, therefore, that it is in the focal works of both writers that the greatest sense of detachment from the objectives of the Imperial project is evidenced. If Heyst, Herrick, Attwater and Jones represent the 'aristocracy' of the Empire that both Stevenson and Conrad come to suspect, then the underclass is represented by Davis, Ricardo, Huish and Pedro. The

distinctions between the social classes are not drawn merely on issues of accent and manners, but are emphasised by the ease with which the lower orders are able to hoodwink their nominal masters, as in the example of Ricardo betraying Jones over Lena's presence on the island. Both Ricardo and Huish, and, in a more practical sense Davis, have attributes of pragmatism which are not evidenced in their social superiors, with, of course the exception of Attwater. Equally, they are not burdened with the sense of existential *angst* that affects both Heyst and Herrick. It may be that both Stevenson and Conrad sense a weakness in the values of the bourgeois figure, and equate the combined lack of energy and recurring sense of *ennui* with degeneration.

The structural method by which Stevenson divides the action of *The Ebb Tide* has its parallel in the Conrad text and demonstrates there the same insistence on symbolic significance in the second half of the narrative as Stevenson's earlier novel. Geddes acknowledges the difficulty involved in assessing the problems posed by this aspect of *Victory*:

Much of the disagreement concerning the meaning and success of *Victory* stems from an unwillingness to accommodate the mixing of fictional modes; or perhaps it would be more accurate to say, from a mystification as to how such a mixture should be handled critically. [CLN, 45]

The difficulties arising from the 'mixing of fictional modes' alluded to by Geddes are important in establishing that Conrad, following Stevenson, experiments with a blend in *Victory* similar to that used by Stevenson in *The Ebb Tide*. The resulting blend, constituted partly from realism and partly from

symbolism, produces an innovative fictional amalgam that characterises these proto-Modernist texts.

The portrayal of the malign aspects of imperialism and its ultimately de-stabilising effects is achieved in *Victory* using a patterning that involves doubling which mirrors the narrative arrangements evidenced in *The Ebb Tide* where Stevenson de-stabilises the text by adjusting the alliances. For example, Herrick's apparent abandonment of his fellow beachcombers to establish common ground with Attwater involves a re-arrangement of the structure of the frame narrative to take account of new and important themes. Several doublings of a derivative nature surface in the Conrad text involving Morrison, Heyst, Lena, Ricardo and Jones in these patterns: Morrison and Lena, Morrison and Heyst, Lena and Ricardo and Heyst and Jones. In common with the arrangements of *The Ebb Tide*, these dynamically shifting allegiances illustrate and highlight the differences in personalities and show that whatever the pairings, none of them result in stability. The patterning in *Victory*, as in *The Ebb Tide*, points up several oppositions in characterisation. Lena, unlike Heyst, can act and does so decisively. Herrick, immobilised for much of the time in reflective reverie is astounded by Attwater's swift and lethal action in the matter of the runaway servant. Heyst and Herrick are clearly 'related' in a number of ways but most obviously as they share the incapacity for action outlined earlier and reinforced by Erdinast-Vulcan's observation:

In his admission to Lena that he is powerless to protect her (p. 347) that he has ‘neither force nor conviction’, ‘neither strength nor persuasion’ to act (p. 350), Heyst himself relates his passivity to his view of reality as a mesh of illusions. [JC, 257]

These parallels, coincidental or otherwise, function to establish close links between *Victory* and *The Ebb Tide* and set both texts at a short distance in structural terms from ‘The Beach of Falesá.’

It may be that these close resemblances in patterning, added to the common themes between the two texts, led Cedric Watts to question whether or not *Victory* should be considered a major Conrad text when he posited the following statement suggesting *Victory* was: ‘cumbrously, heavy-handedly, and at times ludicrously allegoric...appallingly bad passages of dialogue demolish the rule that this text is one of the major works.’⁶ Perhaps *Victory* transgresses the Conrad canon in Watts’ mind *because* it bears close resemblance to the Stevenson text, which Watts’ clearly disregards in terms of literary merit, but it might also be argued that Watts simply identifies problems with the text that appear greater when compared with *The Ebb Tide*: Conrad’s novel is over-long and is slow to address some of the central issues. It is not until the three villains arrive on Samburan that the narrative develops pace and engages the reader’s interest. Conrad’s critical acuity is dulled by the cumbersome nature of the text whereas Stevenson, with typical economy, makes telling points within minimalist symbolic structures which allow the key themes to be pointed up clearly and concisely.

Towards the conclusion of his essay, '*The Ebb Tide and Victory*', Watts make this rather unusual comment which again throws light on an apparent need to minimise the debt to Stevenson when considering *Victory*:

Therefore when account has been taken of the numerous differences between the two novels, *The Ebb Tide* may still be seen as contributing to that remarkably complicated melange of literary source-materials from which *Victory* emerged. In Conrad's earlier and greater works, '*Heart of Darkness*', *Lord Jim*, *Nostromo* and *The Secret Agent*, the melodramatic features in the plots were, in the main, amply redeemed by a range of distancing devices: for example, irony, satire, black comedy and oblique narration. Towards the end of *Victory* (in my opinion), the melodrama tends to be predictable, and distancing devices are either inoperative or insufficient. In these negative respects, too, *Victory* resembles *The Ebb Tide*.

[TETV, 134]

Watts, perhaps in his eagerness to play down positive aspects of the creative re-working of *The Ebb Tide*, emphasises the similarities in the endings to both texts. The melodrama that surrounds the vitriol episode is mirrored in the concluding section of *Victory*, and further confirms Conrad's adoption of some of the central tropes of the Stevenson text. In an oddly contradictory argument that appears to suggest that the resemblances between the texts are occasional and even then unimportant, Watts then seeks to concede the 'negative' similarity in relation to the melodramatic weakness of the conclusion.

The significance of the ending of the Stevenson text centres not upon the presence of melodrama, which is clearly a narrative device in *The Ebb Tide*, but upon the lack of closure. The importance of the ending lies not in relation to Huish's plan to overcome Attwater the symbol of corruptive imperialism, but in his failure to achieve that end so that the melodrama becomes irrelevant

within the wider context of the text's open-ended conclusion. The points of similarity in the concluding sections of both these texts relate to the European presence in foreign places as they compete for commercial gain. Heyst's presence in Samburan, like Herrick's in Tahiti, is predicated upon the acquisition of wealth. That *The Ebb Tide* and *Victory* differ in the particularity of their endings does not undermine the argument that they share common structural and thematic elements. The Conrad text emphasises the emptiness of Heyst's existence in an early Modernist reading of the meaninglessness of much of what was done in the name of European civilisation.

The Ebb Tide is perhaps the less conclusive of the two texts: of the two endings Stevenson's leaves the greater sense of uncertainty as Herrick awaits the next 'flood' to be taken once again, perhaps, half-way around the world. The sense of uncertainty is replaced in the Conrad text by a finality that is characterized by its over-powering negativity. Davidson attempts to explain events:

'I suppose you are certain that Baron Heyst is dead?'

'He is – ashes, your Excellency,' said Davidson, wheezing a little; 'he and the girl together. I suppose he couldn't stand his thoughts before her dead body – and fire purifies everything. That Chinaman of whom I told your Excellency helped me to investigate next day, when the embers got cooled a little. We found enough to be sure. He's not a bad Chinaman. He told me that he had followed Heyst and the girl through the forest from pity, and partly out of curiosity. He watched the house till he saw Heyst go out, after dinner, and Ricardo come back alone. While he was dodging there, it occurred to him that he had better cast the boat adrift, for fear those scoundrels should come round by water and bombard the village from the sea with their revolvers and Winchesters. He judged that they were devils enough for anything. So he walked down the wharf quietly; and as he got into the boat, to cast her off, that hairy man who, it seems, was dozing in her, jumped up growling, and Wang shot him dead. Then he shoved the boat off as far as he could and went away.'

There was a pause. Presently Davidson went on, in his tranquil manner:

‘Let Heaven look after what has been purified. The wind and rain will take care of the ashes. The carcass of that follower, secretary, or whatever the unclean ruffian called himself, I left where it lay, to swell and rot in the sun. His principal had shot him neatly through the heart. Then, apparently, this Jones went down the wharf to look for the boat and for the hairy man. I suppose he tumbled into the water by accident – or perhaps not by accident. The boat and the man were gone, and the scoundrel saw himself all alone, his game clearly up, and fairly trapped. Who knows? The water’s very clear there, and I could see him huddled up on the bottom between two piles, like a heap of bones in a blue silk bag, with only the head and the feet sticking out. Wang was very pleased when he discovered him. That made everything safe, he said, and he went back at once over the hill to fetch his Alfuro woman back to the hut.’

Davidson took out his handkerchief to wipe the perspiration off his forehead.

‘And then, your Excellency, I went away. There was nothing to be done there.’

‘Clearly,’ assented the Excellency.

Davidson, thoughtful, seemed to weigh the matter in his mind, and then murmured with placid sadness:

‘Nothing!’ [V, 410-12]

The foregoing extract is given in full to provide the background for a comparison with the concluding section of *The Ebb Tide*. In order to illustrate that the creative reworking of a text need not involve slavish adherence to the earlier text’s every detail, it may be argued that it re-figures key elements of that text.

Conrad does indulge in melodrama in the conclusion to *Victory*, and the same can be said of Stevenson. However, the closing section of *The Ebb Tide* suggests that Stevenson is uncomfortable with the scepticism that characterizes Herrick, his autobiographical alter ego, and looks backwards to the certainties of his youth in the Calvinist tradition. Davis’s injunction to repeat the words of Mark 9:24, ‘Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief’ cannot be followed by Herrick, he has gone beyond simple acceptance; bound up in his sense of personal failure and unworthiness he has passed into a

nihilistic world, separated from salvation. In this sense, Conrad creates in Axel Heyst, a parallel figure equally isolated in a world which increasingly is devoid of meaning for him. In common with Herrick, Heyst cannot believe in realities but rather is similarly captured within his own passivity. In the ambiguous manner of Herrick's uncertainty about his next venture, Heyst too is sceptical regarding the promise held in the future. The idealism which embodies Heyst's father's world view is undermined and negated by the son's scepticism. The symbolic significance of this reaction mirrors Herrick's disassociation from the Imperial project in *The Ebb Tide* and there is a brotherly relationship discernible between these dissident voices. The son is not the equal of the father, the New Imperialism does not share the civilising evangelism of the earlier colonial period and both Herrick and Heyst are important symbols of proto-Modernist scepticism regarding the Imperial project. With 'The Beach of Falesá', Stevenson had begun the process of re-figuring the European presence in the South Seas he would develop in *The Ebb Tide* and Conrad follows a similar path in relation to the role of Europeans in the Far East and in Africa. Both writers are to an extent onlookers in that process, although both are also implicated in the Imperial project in direct ways mentioned above. Stevenson and Conrad are aware of the toll that is levied against the participants in the drive for commercial advantage. Notably in the fiction under consideration in this study both writers catalogue the outrages committed against the indigenous populations, but the awareness that the process is equally corrosive as it impacts upon the

Europeans emerges as a major theme. Exposure to the inhumanity that is bound up in commercial exploitation is experienced by Heyst, but equally, there is evidence of Heyst's awareness of himself as an onlooker in that process, implicated and yet impotent to effect change at the same time. In this respect also, there exists a relational link to Herrick who is afflicted with a similar frame of mind. Indeed, the parallel between Herrick and Heyst is at its most obvious in this respect: both are intrinsically *fin-de-siècle* figures and each views the world as an aesthetic experience. Herrick leaves evidence of his presence in the derelict prison in the form of a stave of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony scratched on the cell wall, and Heyst makes a virtue out of the silence that separates him from the Zangiacomo orchestra. The desire for insulation from the company of other, and by implication baser, humans is encapsulated by Herrick in his cultural elitism, and by Heyst in the pursuit of physical separation. Both are harbingers of the isolated heroes of later 'modern' novels, left to ponder their predicaments, but Herrick and Heyst are contained within a genre that on the surface at least, continues to share tropes of adventure romance.

However, Stevenson and Conrad are concerned with collapse of certainties as they become conscious of the human cost of the Imperial project, and the inability to rationalise appropriate responses evidenced by Herrick and Heyst is symptomatic of the crisis of Empire. The texts under consideration in this study form a bridge between the literature of Empire that sought to legitimise the assumptions, and that Stevenson and Conrad challenge, and full-blown

Modernism. The proto-Modernist response to Empire is not constrained within the shaping discourse of adventure romance but is rather characterized by an experimental blend of surviving tropes from adventure fiction and the deployment of symbolic and metaphorical devices which often substitute for overt references to taboo subjects. In the core texts pertinent to the present thesis, Stevenson can be seen to clear the ground for later writers, including Conrad with whom he shared common interests. Consequently, 'The Beach of Falesá' and *The Ebb Tide* should be considered as essential elements in any discussion of anti-Imperialist, proto-Modernist fiction and as the texts that locate Stevenson alongside Conrad on Jameson's 'strategic fault line.'

¹ Joseph Conrad, *Victory: An Island Tale* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 'Introduction' by Tony Tanner 1986, Preface and 'Notes' by John Batchelor, 1986. p.3. All subsequent references are to this edition, and are given in brackets in the text.

² Cedric Watts, 'The Ebb Tide and Victory', *Conradiana*, 28, (1996), 133-137.

³ Daphna Erdinast-Vulcan, 'The Failure of Textuality' in *Joseph Conrad*, ed. and with an 'Introduction' by Andrew Michael Roberts, Longman Critical Reader Series, (London & New York: Longman, 1998), pp. 247-269, (pp. 256-7).

⁴ Rudyard Kipling, 'Only A Subaltern' in *The Man Who Would Be King and Other Stories*, ed. by L.L. Cornell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

⁵ Gary Geddes, *Conrad's Later Novels* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1980), pp. 44-5.

⁶ Cedric Watts, 'Reflections on Victory', *Conradiana*, 15, (1983), 76-78.

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